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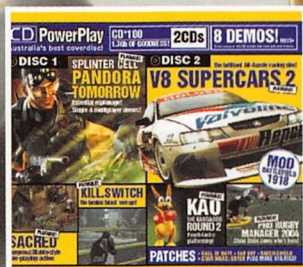
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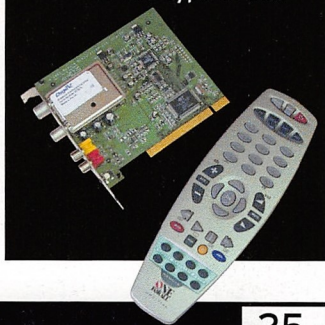
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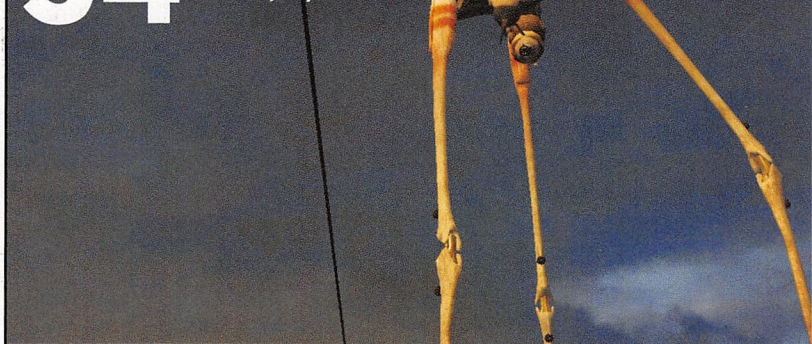
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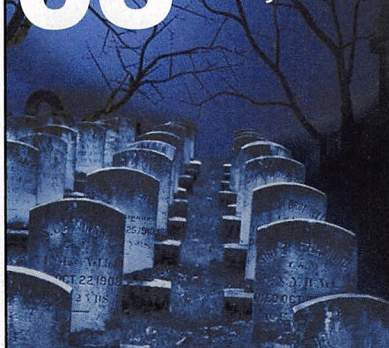
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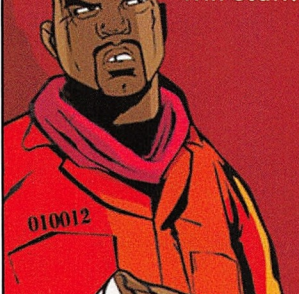
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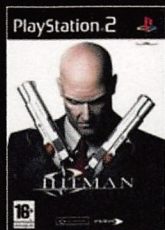


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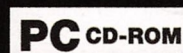
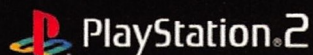
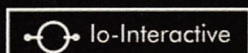
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COMING MAY



Last Action Hero

It was only eight years ago that PC PowerPlay launched itself - all bright-eyed, bushy tailed and staple bound - onto an unsuspecting Australian public. (Oh, and New Zealand, too - can I just take this opportunity to apologise for every single goddamned occasion we've forgotten about New Zealand? Sorry.)

It was only eight years ago we were excited about playing the demo for Duke Nukem 3D, the title we chose to grace the cover of our first issue. A few issues later we reviewed the full game and perhaps PC gaming's first action hero was born.

It was only four years ago for our 50th issue we once again had the flat-topped one on the cover because there were new screenshots of the sequel, Duke Nukem Forever, to publish. Four years on it looked like Duke might

seriously be extending a second invitation to "come get some", but of course we're still waiting to RSVP.

In the meantime PC gaming has found a new icon to worship, and so this - our 100th issue - has none other than Gordon Freeman, star of Half-Life, on the cover

Remarkably fortuitous is how I'd describe the events that lead to Gordon succeeding Duke. Originally we had planned to drag Duke out of his self-imposed seclusion for one last hurrah, but sadly developer 3D Realms wasn't willing to play along. Then Valve decided it was time to allow the first people outside of their offices to actually play Half-Life 2. I noted when I'd be flying to Seattle, took a peek at how this coincided with our production schedule, realised it was an utterly

perfect fit for our 100th issue, and said hell yes, I'll be there.

So I've played Half-Life 2 now. It's really rather good. How good? It's perhaps still too early to tell. However nothing I experienced diminished my conviction that Half-Life 2 is potentially the most important PC game of all time. Hopefully my report beginning on page 54 offers you a glimpse of that potential.

Today, eight years on, PC gaming is facing its sternest ever challenge from other platforms. We need games such as Half-Life 2 more so than ever before. But, hey, Gordon's already saved our world once, I'm sure he can do it again.

David Wildgoose,
Editor

FAR CRY GIVE AWAY

Thanks to Ubisoft, 100 of you are now the very lucky new owners of Far Cry, the 90% rated (see review last issue) tropical shooter from Crytek and Ubisoft. As part of our 100th issue celebrations, we slipped a random 100 copies of the full version of Far Cry into the DVD edition of this issue. If you scored one, well done! Enjoy the game!

PC PowerPlay

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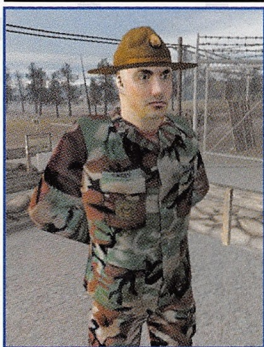
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INBOX

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MILITARISTIC FANTASIES



Re: America's Army (PCPP#98). I play this game myself, and have a great fondness for it, but I cannot believe the gloss over it was given. Firstly, I have seen a number of players talking about: joining up on Monday; what squad are you; I'm retired; I'm a vet, and real life gun experiences. America's Army has a Teen rating so that 10-13 year olds can get to really fulfill their militaristic fantasies with real life tactics. That's good early development for future recruits. There are also some teams and some maps that promote rushing (Hospital, CSAR). To say that the

weapons are realistic is false. Real rounds spin in flight, and drop (which is NOT in AA, try Delta Force). There is much talk on the forums of the need for realistic gravity (DROP!) in this game. Also the rates of fire are far off, with the M4 (and AK74/SU) at about half its actual rate. Added to this the game promotes brutal CQB, which appears to be blatant anti-Geneva Convention sentiment. RPGs are used for CQB, 0.50 'anti-material rifles' against opponents etc, yet they will not add gameplay for the holstered knife of the Spec Ops forces. The netcode is nothing brilliant with bad lag/pings fairly commonplace (check forums). Punkbuster still can't stop the script kiddies from ruining AA, aim and recoil hacks are around. Finally, drivable vehicles are not going to be in the upcoming patch (and probably not near-future either), rather there will be a stationary Stryker with a 0.50 cal emplacement on top. So all the people with '0.50cal' in their nicks can now better continue their anti-Geneva sentiments on unsuspecting freedom fighters.

Ben Bridgford

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HEROES

Atari is offering a free Heroes game to the author of every letter published in Inbox! This month's game is Master of Orion 3!



TORTURE ME

I was going to write this letter for a long time, but have finally decided to do it. In my opinion, PCPP has been going down hill. Why? The ENORMOUS coverage and ever increasing amount given to games in the making! Sorry, but as nice as it might be to know what's coming up, it's far more interesting to be looking at what I could be playing now! The amount of coverage given to previews is now the bulk of the magazine, even the COVERS of the magazine are all showing off games in the making. So please a bit more coverage to the current games and technologies out there, besides, previews of Doom 3 and Half-Life 2 do more to torture me in anticipation than anything else. Maybe it's not so bad, but it seems to me that for the last many months, there has been a lack of truly

amazing technology developments and gaming, it seems dry at the moment.

Sam Leslie

You're right, of course, but often we have no choice in the matter. At certain times of the year, there just aren't enough games released to fill the issue with reviews. What we're going to be doing in future - thanks to our relationship with www.gamesuniverse.com.au - is start reviewing all those games that come out overseas but don't get published here. Titles such as Silent Storm, for instance, reviewed this issue. However, we also feel that previews and features are just as important to the magazine as reviews. Many of our readers enjoy (even prefer) reading about those games on the horizon, so we need something to keep them happy as well.

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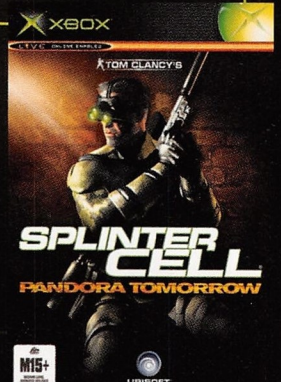


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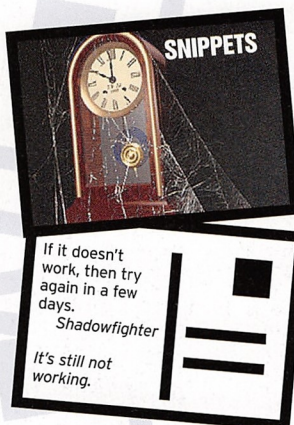
I have to disagree with a few things Josh Upton wrote about large gaming companies in PCPP#98. I would not go as far as to say they have "big heads". In fact I think a company like Valve, responsible for a huge success such as Half-Life, would not be feeling "invincible". Of course they want to again please, but with this duty would not come a feeling of invulnerability, but more a feeling of nervousness as they try to better their last effort and again please the public. This is a massive task, so have some sympathy, son.

Rowan Hamilton

UTTER DISMAY

After reading issue #98 and the Inbox letter from the store attendant I felt compelled to tell this awful story. One day I was walking around looking at games in my local EB store, wanting to buy a nice game under \$50 dollars (I'm only in Yr 10, and so don't have that much to spend). Suddenly something caught my eye, a box with a guy lying on the floor in full camo gear staring into the scope of a sniper rifle. As a sniper rifle lover, I walked closer to see what the game was called, and - guess what - it was "Marine Sharp Shooter", and it was going for \$40. So not having read the review for it (you guys hadn't reviewed it yet) I pulled the game off the shelf and

hurriedly went to pay for it. That was probably the biggest mistake of my life.



Within five hours of getting home, I had finished the game and was looking to see if I could refund the game, by reading the terms on the EB website. To my utter dismay, it appears that EB only refund or trade in for PSX, Xbox, and Gamecube games, and merely offer a replacement for a game if it is defective. Needless to say it wasn't defective and so I was stuck with this crappy game with no possibility of refunding it or selling it off to a friend secondhand. There really should be a refund rule in

place which says that you can refund games, you felt you paid for wrongly, within 48 hours of something, don't you think?

Jack Zeng

We think CTU Marine Sharpshooter should be considered "defective".

OLDIES PLAYING

I think Neil Ford (PCPP#98) is wrong about grown-ups (his words not mine, I would use mature) gamers. I will be 45+ later this year and am addicted to MMORPGs. It started when my youngest son and his friend got me

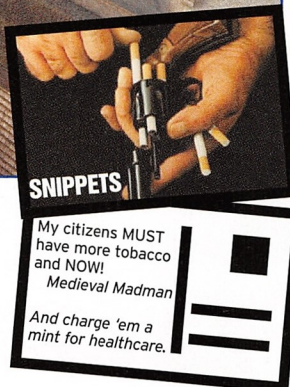
five years and yes I do come home from work and play for about two hours each night and spend most weekends trying to level. We have gone from a one computer family to three so I can play in peace without the kids yelling at me to get off the computer. I have even set my alarm to 2am so I can go on raids and yes I still go work. There may not be a lot of us mature gamers out there but our numbers are growing and we are very dedicated.

Cheryl Gordon

Can you be our Mum, please?

RAISE AWARENESS

Hi my name is Aaron. I love PC PowerPlay. I have every magazine from the past two years (first year and a half CD, past 6 months DVD). I am a disabled gamer with Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita. I love to play Battlefield 1942 and cannot wait for Vietnam to come out. I typed this letter to raise awareness of disabled gamers in Australia. I think it is great whenever I say to someone, be it in a forum or



chatroom, that I am a disabled gamer and they don't think any different of me. I go to a LAN centre called Venturenet in Mandurah WA and I am a regular there and get treated the same as any other gamer. So well done to the gaming community.

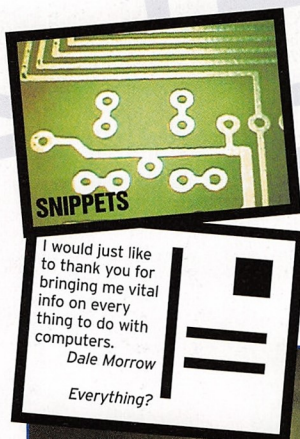
Aaron Camm

WHEN STRUTTING

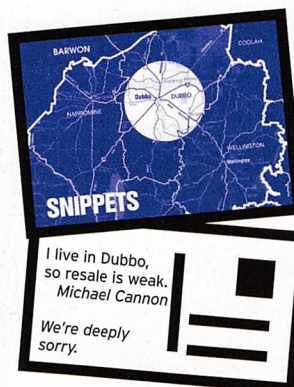
Two days ago I went to my local games store to buy myself a birthday present with my grandmother's money. I wanted Freelancer but when I got there not only did they not have it... they did not have any good games! Nothing that was good there would run on my computer. All good stuff that would run was not there! No UT2K3, no MOHAA, no BF1942, NOTHING GOOD! NO FREELANCER! When strutting through the Canberra Centre like I owned the place, my grandmother said "How about we look at David Jones?" I thought this was what she would say but when I got to their measly little PC games section I find that not only do they have Freelancer but also BF1942, MOHAA and UT2K3! I mean what is this?

IR Shoe

The irony, of course, being you thought Freelancer was a good game. Hilarious.

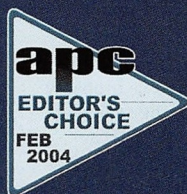


hooked on EverQuest. He just wanted me to pay the fee to play and didn't realise I would take over the computer. I spent most off my free time living in Norrath; housework was something I did while zoning. While there I met many mature players, though mature females were few. When we moved to Dark Age of Camelot, again I was surprised with the number of us oldies playing. I have been playing MMORPGs for over



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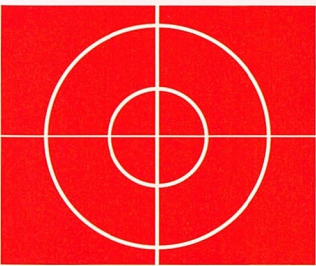
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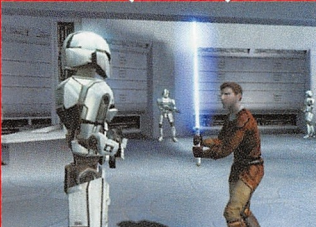
Insight

KUNG FU CHAOS



Clearly Lionhead has too much time on its hands if its newest game provides any evidence. In between working on Black & White 2, Lionhead programmer Mark Healey has designed Rag Doll Kung Fu, a parody of the current penchant for exaggerated physics, a demonstration of the potential of the technology, and a humorous fighting game all rolled into one. Check out www.lhtimes.com for more info.

KOTOR(MENT)



KOTOR 2 is real. We've had it verified that a follow-up to Bioware's very successful foray into Star Wars role-playing is, as they say, in the works. Better still, Obsidian Entertainment, the studio formed by a host of Black Isle defectors (including studio head Feargus Urquhart and genius Torment writer Chris Avellone), is handling development duties while Bioware itself concentrates on other projects. We can't wait.

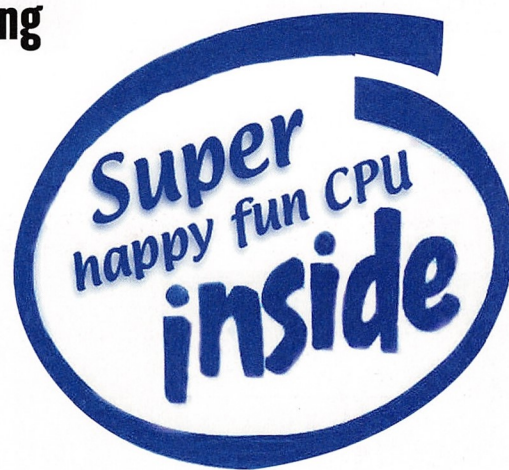
YOU CAN'T SAY NO

After a four-year sabbatical, the Close Combat series is but a few months away from returning to our monitors, albeit in two radically different forms. Now with Take 2 - after passing through the hands of Microsoft and SSI - the plan sees a team-based FPS out in time for Christmas with a 3D RTS due early in the new year. Bet the fans are pleased about that.

GOODBYE GIGAHERTZ! FAREWELL FREQUENCY!

Oz Falls in Broadband Standing

Bennett Ring



A couple of years ago I was at an AMD breakfast when its model number scheme was introduced, replacing the use of clock speeds to indicate CPU performance. I almost choked on my cold toast when the presenter suggested that Intel might hook up with AMD to use the same system. I couldn't believe it - could two competitors team up to make life simpler for consumers, rather than trying to blind them with contradictory and confusing rating schemes?

This sounded too good to be true... and it was. Intel kept on harping on about how frequency was king, and reflected this in the architecture of the Pentium 4, whose deep pipeline was designed to allow the chip to scale to speeds of up to 10GHz. The joint performance rating naming scheme never eventuated, and it appeared that Intel would stick to the use of frequency for CPU naming.

But in a move that smacks of its recent denouncement of 64-bit computing when AMD introduced it, only to tell us a few months later that 64-bit Intel chips are on the way, Intel is about to implement its very own naming scheme. Only this time Intel has taken much longer between the "slag off" and "realise

it's a good idea so must copy" phase. And as you've probably guessed, its naming scheme is totally different to AMD's.

The new scheme uses a combination of the processor family, processor name and processor number to label each CPU. An example of this is the Intel Pentium M processor 735. The Pentium 4 family will use the 5XX series of numbers, Celerons will use 3XX and Pentium Ms will use 7XX. This is rather strange, as we expected the highest performer, the Pentium 4, to have the highest processor number, but Intel has stated clearly that "the digits themselves have no inherent meaning, particularly when looking across families". That'd make far too much sense.

We can't really argue with the logic behind the decision to use processor names, as frequency is becoming increasingly irrelevant when determining CPU performance. Other factors, including frontside bus speed, amount of cache and overall CPU architecture, can have large effects on CPU performance which aren't reflected in the clock speed. It was for this very reason that AMD started using model numbers to suggest that its CPUs were equal

in performance to Intel's CPUs, even though they had much lower clock speeds.

What's annoying is the fact that Intel dismissed AMD's model number scheme, only to do a backflip and adopt a similar stance. Also, it would be quite simple to introduce an industry standard for processor naming, which would accurately indicate relative performance across all CPUs. It would only take some agreement between the two companies, as well as the development of standardised benchmarks, for this to occur.

Unfortunately it's not to be. Consumers will now have absolutely no way to compare processor performance between Intel and AMD based on the processor name. This is probably a good thing for magazines like PC PowerPlay, as reviews are soon going to be the only way to figure out which CPU is best for your needs. Thanks for that Intel!

On a more worrying note, could this mean that Intel's CPU architecture isn't scaling as well as it expected? Judging by the issues it had with getting Prescott out the door, combined with the ditching of frequency based naming, there's good reason to reach this conclusion.

INDIE GAMES FESTIVAL

Get Out of Your Garage

Timothy C. Best

The internet is great for bringing the world together, especially when you're in a country as roomy as Australia, but sometimes it's nice to actually be in a room with people who feel your pain as you describe trying to get a decent tessellating wood-grain texture.

If you can make your way to Melbourne you'll get this and so much more if you hook up with The Independent Game Developer's Conference being held between the 21st and 23rd of May. Sure you'll still have to find the thing; the organisers promise the inner-city

venue will soon be announced.

The idea is to get independent developers, frustrated professions, animators, artists, modders and mappers together as a community at a conference that doesn't cost an arm and a leg.

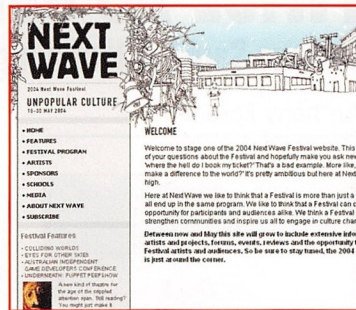
The prices are a mere \$30 for the 3 day package so they are doing well on the arm-and-leg front. If you submit 300 words on a game or project you want to take with you to the Conference you can even get travel subsidy from between \$50 and \$400.

Once you're there you'll see presentations on getting games

funded, distribution models, open source game development, feature a low-budget game engine round-up, publishers and licence agreements as well as practical skill sharing.

Of course there will be debates, round-table discussions and talks from people in the industry, as well as a lot of sharing garage development war stories and talking smack about each other's favourite shooters.

It's part of the Next Wave Festival and it's being put together by the Australia Indie game gurus at www.sumea.com.au so you can check out their site for all of the latest.

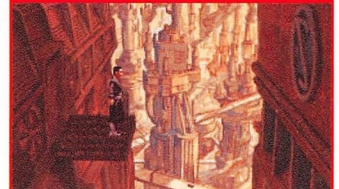


DOCTOR WHO?



Despite a troubled release, (Dr) Derek Smart is keen to persist with his Battlecruiser spin-off, Universal Combat, recently unveiling a more action-focused sequel (crappily) titled Edge To Edge. (Dr) Smart would like to assure his fans that this new game won't suck.

GET BASS



Adventure fans can at last rejoice. Following the tragic cancellation of Sam & Max 2, Revolution Software has revealed plans to revive its point-and-click classic, Beneath a Steel Sky. The cyberpunk precursor to Revolution's Broken Sword series, the original BaSS was recently released into the public domain and was available on PCPP#92's coverdisc.

HORROR



From our 2nd favourite Russian developer comes Pathologic, a horror adventure where memories are "fresh", outbreaks "sudden", danger "constant" and people "doomed". Buka rarely fails to serve up an unusual premise or novel play mechanic, so we're hopeful this will be more than just Silent Hill As Made By Russians. But - hey - even that will do.

GATES BETS ON FREE HARDWARE

Windows .NET license: \$2500 but your PC for free!

Anthony Fordham



The man who once famously mis-predicted that no PC user would ever need more than 640K of memory has busted out with another piece of prophecy: within the decade, hardware will be more or less free.

Of course, this could mean that as part of the total cost of PC ownership, the actual hardware will enjoy a smaller and smaller share as Microsoft's bite of the apple (no pun intended) grows larger.

Gates made the comment at the Gartner Symposium in San Diego CA in late March while discussing Moore's Law.

The famous dictum says any new version of a hardware product will double in power every 18 months while

either maintaining or slightly lowering its cost. Gates believes this will continue for at least another decade.

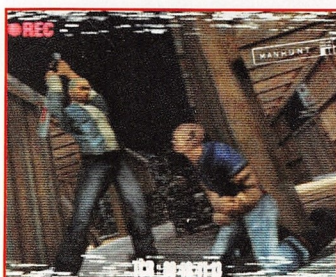
However, the fly in the free hardware ointment could be something we see already today: Nokia is more than capable of selling a fully-functional mobile phone for about \$30, but this cost is simply too low to be worth bothering with. Chuck in a colour screen, messaging functionality and a camera so the phone can be sold instead for \$300.

Most observers see no reason why companies such as Dell and HP wouldn't add extra functionality to tomorrow's PCs in order to maintain a \$1000 - \$1500 price point.

GAME RE-CLASSIFICATION

Well, sort of

Timothy C. Best



Legislation has been put forward to bring game classification in line with film classification ... but without adding the deadwood of R or X ratings.

What this means is that there will no longer be a G8+ category, it will fall into being PG (Parental Guidance) and M15+ will just become M (Mature).

The actual definitions of the ratings won't change at all, so all it

means is some re-labelling.

You've really got to wonder what the point of all of this is. Why bother moving games onto the same system but then leaving out the adult end of the scale?

Attorney General Philip Ruddock told the Australian that, "the Bill responds to community demands for a simple, common sense system that is the same across all classified products."

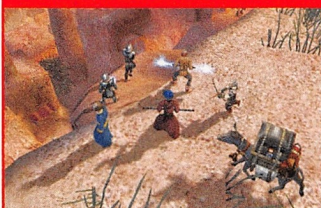
So why not actually do that? Sure, X rated games would cause a panic but this would be the perfect time to introduce an R rating so that the classification board could have a little more choice when deciding how to classify games. Things like GTA3, Manhunt and Soldier of Fortune sequels could cop an R while the games that really offended the kids at the office could still be refused a classification.

CIV UPGRADE



Hardcore strategy sim Galactic Civilizations has spawned an expansion pack. The Altharian Prophecy will feature the usual new stuff - campaign, units, scenarios - and witness the debut of two alien races, the Korx and the Drath. As opposed to the Krath and the Dorx, you might say.

PATENTLY OBVIOUS



The registration of trademarks has become a rich vein for gossip-mongering gamers eager to mine the latest hot rumour. This month saw it surface that in November of last year developer Gas Powered Games secured the rights to the name Supreme Commander. Couple this with GPG's call for new staff to work on a new RTS title and we think anyone can put 2 and 2 together.

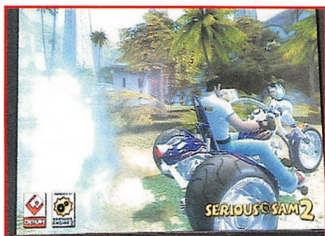
GAS PUMPED

In further Gas Powered news for all you Gas Powered fans out there, Gas Powered head honcho Chris Taylor has put Gas Powered pen to Gas Powered paper in signing a Gas Powered deal to tie his Gas Powered studio to publishing giant Electronic Arts. In no coincidence whatsoever, the deal is for an as-yet-untitled but undoubtedly Gas Powered real-time strategy game. We think we know...

TWICE AS SERIOUS

Serious Sam 2 full of allegedly cool stuff

Anthony Fordham



Croteam lead designer Davor Hunksi has promised the sequel to the most fire-button-mashing game of 2002 "will have all the features that exist and that will exist in the world!!! (sic)."

The developer promises Serious Sam 2 will keep fans happy by including everything they've come to expect, especially the co-operative mode that made the original such a riot at parties.

However, the team has learnt from the experience of porting to Xbox. The new game will therefore have a more cartoonish feel than the original, with weapons even more outlandish and enemies even more headless and screaming.

Most importantly, Croteam has completely re-written the Serious engine's netcode for smoother online play, one of the few areas where the original game really fell on its head.

Hunksi also confirms that Serious Sam 2 will have a bunch of vehicles to play with, from the new-but-obvious motorbike to the crazy-and-pregnant-with-potential snowmobile. Other vehicles are currently being kept a close secret, for some reason.

Hunksi is unapologetic about the lack of complex location

damage on enemies. "Due to the arcade nature of the game and the sheer number of enemies you're up against, we will have just one hitbox for their bodies," he says.

Fortunately though, larger enemies, such as Sam's famous boss monster, will have more hitboxes to allow the player to target specific weapons or extra heads.

As for the game content, Croteam is once again promising a seven-episode epic set in and around the worlds dominated by Furious Mental, the universe's most poorly-defined bad guy.

However, keep in mind that the original game only shipped with one of four promised episodes, although back then Croteam was poor. Now, thanks to Sam's popularity, they're fabulously rich.

ONE XNA TO DEVELOP THEM ALL

MS moves PC and Xbox closer together

Timothy C. Best



Microsoft has announced plans to issue a common set of tools and development standards for PC and Xbox game development. This new development environment will be called by the catchy name of XNA and it will be good for Windows XP and Xbox games as well as the upcoming generation of Microsoft platforms including Xbox 2 and Longhorn.

In the past Xbox has shared many PC components and used

DirectX for its games, but XNA goes a step further. Why bother wasting money on a port when you can build most of a game for both systems under one roof?

One of the biggest things that scares me about this development is that ports still need to be ports even if the code from a PC runs perfectly on an Xbox and vice-versa. This just encourages slackness; transferring a game between systems needs loving

rebalancing and a hot new take on the game. Keyboard and mouse controls are a lot more responsive than a gamepad, not to mention being a whole lot easier to type on.

Beyond that, we've seen that consoles get their longevity not through hardware updates but through programmers learning all the dirty tricks and backdoors on a system ... something that is hard to do when you share pretty much all of your code between it and a PC.

WIN!

ALTEC LANSING SPEAKER COMPETITION #2!

If you're looking to cause permanent hearing damage, aggravate your quiet neighbours or scare the hell out of your pets, a good set of PC speakers should do the trick. Altec Lansing is a brand synonymous with high quality speakers, so we were more than happy to give away three sets from its new range. To prolong the Altec Lansing lovin' we'll be spreading the comp over three months, so this issue we're giving away a set of the new 5021s - with bass that goes boom, two ultra slick satellites and some knobs to twiddle, you'll be rocking away into the wee hours. Props to Innovision (www.innovision.com.au) for supplying these speakers. To enter the comp, simply answer the following question on the back of an envelope and post your entry to the address below:

Q. What RMS are these speakers rated at?



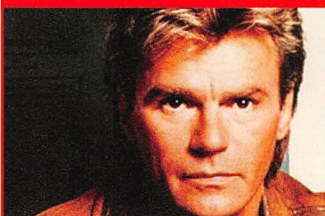
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STARGAZING



Popular sci-fi TV series Stargate SG-1 has at last been picked up for a game conversion. German publisher JoWood has snagged the rights to McGuyver's other show but there's no word on a release date or even what sort of game to expect. Which is why it's just a news snippet in this little box.

MYST IT?



In the wake of URU's passing into the offline-only realm, Ubisoft has generously released an expansion pack for download. This will be followed by a second free add-on in the coming weeks. We'll include the first next issue and the second as soon as possible.

RESCUED



In further EA news - and further ex-Blizzard developer news - not to mention further not-really-news news - the aforementioned publishing giant has taken under its wing the start-up studio Castaway, which was formed by a bunch of guys who were involved with Diablo. Unsurprisingly they're being set to work on a title described only as an "action RPG".

A US software company, Symbiot, is working on commercial security software that doesn't just try to block hackers but gets up a head of steam and goes out guns blazing. Do I need to mention that this is a company from Texas?

When Symbiot's software detects an attack it can react by doing anything from profiling users and blocking upstream providers to launching denial-of-service attacks of its own.

AUDIO SNIPER

Demor sounds on target

Timothy C. Best

If you're one of those people who think that FPS games worry far too much about graphics and nothing else, then we might have the shooter for you.

A bunch of students at the Utrecht School of the Arts in the Netherlands have developed a first-person shooter where there are no graphics. This baby is full audio.

Players strap a laptop to their backs, put on a head tracker, head out into an open area - a soccer field being a good choice - and then press a button on the joystick in their hands.

As soon as that button goes down the game is centred on you and it tracks your movements via GPS as you duck and weave. Then the head tracker tells the game how to create the virtual world around you and players hear a harsh soundscape that gets more pleasant and soothing the more bad guys you bag.

Just going on sound players have to shoot the hostile mutants coming to get them with the joystick precisely tracking your aiming and targeting. You get points for winging a critter but the



big money comes with precisely-centred hits.

There are four levels to Demor including a factory, a swamp and wasteland. If all of this sounds cool but you don't think you have the laptop, joy-stick, head-tracker and GPS to make it all work, the team has also released a PC-adapted demo version of the game, which doesn't require funky equipment beyond speakers or headphones.

Beyond being plain cool, Demor has obvious applications for the blind as well as people who want to protect Whitney Houston in snow storms.



BRANDED A VICTIM

Cops say, iPod's white earphones make you a target for muggers

Anthony Fordham

Have you succumbed to our constant pressure to go out and buy an iPod and enjoy the delights of what at least some of us here at PCPP think is the world's best mp3 player? Well then, take note.

Apart from the high purchase price and problems with the irreplaceable battery only lasting 18 months of heavy use, police have discovered yet another drawback to owning Apple's most successful product: people really like stealing it.

The problem has becoming

significant enough in the UK for West Midlands police to issue a warning to iPod owners: your white earphones make you stand out like a sore thumb with "mug me" tattooed on it.

Birmingham resident Roland Baskerville was spotted by a mugger who pointed at his white earphones and asked him if he was listening to an iPod. When Baskerville said yes, the thief pulled a knife and demanded the device. Rather than be stabbed, Baskerville handed over his

20GB, \$600 toy.

Police say the solution is simple: buy a pair of earphones that aren't white (and perhaps also think about not using expensive personal electronic devices in bad neighbourhoods). However, iPod retailers believe some users are so dedicated to the iPod's status as a fashion symbol that "they'd rather be robbed than change the colour of the headphones."

At the risk of editorialising, what a bunch of idiots.

GREY ICE

World gets a little more cyberpunk

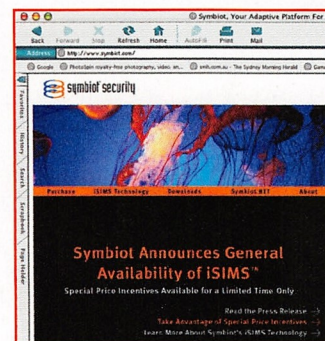
Timothy C. Best

The Texan company justifies its approach by quoting the US military doctrine of "necessity and proportionality," meaning that you harder you screw them, the harder they should be able to screw back. Of course this hasn't really been all that well thought through.

For starters, these counter attacks could cause as much damage as the hackers and a lot of innocent people might be sharing a service with the bad boys. Then, of course, there's the fact that hackers

pretty much always use hijacked accounts anyway, meaning that your counter attack is likely to zing a whole bunch of poor saps who don't even know why they've been taken out.

While I'm pretty sure that something like this would cause more harm than good, you have to appreciate the way that the big companies are going out of their way to bring to life William Gibson's vision of a cyber-world gone nuts.



WIN!



MAGIC COMPETITION

Our friends at Wizards of the Coast are keen to impress upon you the importance, significance and downright entertainment value of the newest addition to the long-running Magic the Gathering card game, Fifth Dawn. Knowing full well that free stuff is the best way to grab your attention, Wizards have given us TEN Fifth Dawn theme decks to give away. The ten lucky winners will also receive 3 Fifth Dawn booster packs too.

To enter the comp, simply answer the following question on the back of an envelope and post your entry to the address below:

Q. In Buffy the Vampire Slayer, who played the role of Buffy's sister, Dawn?

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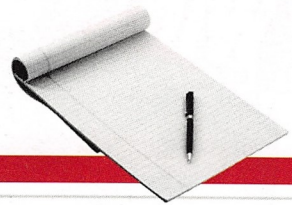
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DEVELOPER DIARY



S.T.A.L.K.E.R Shadow of Chernobyl

Developer Diary #3

With realism being the single most important catchment term for S.T.A.L.K.E.R we knew that physics would be central to its creation. Achieving realistic environments could be served in part by the graphical detail but for that next level in design a whole new physics engine had to be created in order to stimulate immersive gameplay and heighten the real 'presence' effect. The greater our work at this level, the greater that feeling of presence would be.

This completely new physics engine allows us to create an environment in which objects are truly interactive. Chairs, tables, bricks, cans and many other objects can be pushed, knocked, destroyed and otherwise interfered with in ways that feel natural. Whereas many games would limit this interactivity to "quest items", S.T.A.L.K.E.R removes these restrictive blocks, allowing the player to fully explore the world on a real life footing:

"Exploring a semi-ruined building in pitch blackness brings more than its fair share of dangers. As careful as I knew I must be, there was no avoiding some of the pitfalls brought about through years of structural decay. I had thought myself prepared for any encounter - any encounter except my own stupidity. Into

the claustrophobic darkness I walked too surely, too reliant, perhaps, upon earlier intelligence and not upon the simple headlamp I had at my disposal. An overhanging light fitting glanced off the side of my head, forcing me backwards into a wooden fence whose rotten boards splintered beneath my weight. Cursing my clumsiness I switched on my lamp, its beam breaking across the still swinging light fitting. One swift kick sent a rusty pail deep into the shadows where lengthening fingers showered it with old plaster fragments. Above me I hear the final, perhaps fatal, results of my errors. I squat, quiet at last, hoping to hope itself that I can at last turn the darkness into a friend..."

The scope offered by such a powerful physics engine allows for intrinsic realism as well as the nascent tactical opportunities that emerge from combat or reconnaissance missions. Consider the following scenario:

"My first day in the Zone and I am beginning to realise that more preparation would have been advised. Every inch of this land sets you on edge in ways no other military operation has ever done. If it were only a matter of dealing with 'the enemy' I would be more at ease but it isn't and I'm not. Earlier today, when the light was still poor, I allowed my edginess to control my reactions as a sudden movement in the distance caused me to shoot first. The target turned out to be another stalker, perhaps a hostile one from a clan I had yet to meet but my path was set and consequences would have to be paid. In an effort to forestall such payments I managed to drag the body out of sight and into a place no sensible stalker would be likely to search. Ha. No sensible

stalker. That would be me then."

The process of dragging bodies is not peculiar to stalkers. Many in-game creatures also possess the intelligence and ability to use objects in this way and so lessons must be learned about the nature of your environment. Some objects will serve as handy ways of stunning or injuring opponents whilst others will provide essential defence against explosions or gunfire. Then again they may not as not all materials will be able to sustain the concentrated hail of Kalashnikov bullets.

Special attention has been given to body physics with all the dynamic opportunities that follow. As advanced skeleton animation system control realistic body movements to a very high level of detail. The body of each human character contains around 50 bones, all of which can be adjusted - right down to the little finger. Maximum bend properties for the bones, joint stiffness, weight and so on are just some of the many parameters involved in defining movement. All of this contributes to the way in which a body will then react, whether it is falling or being shot. Watch for the way bullets even leave trace holes in the bodies. Given this level of programming it would be remiss of us to not follow every avenue opened to us. Under heavy injuries, the player will move more slowly; hand injuries will cause tremors and difficulties when aiming; leg injuries will cause the player to limp. It's a liberating experience to utilise physics in this way. We even have the type of

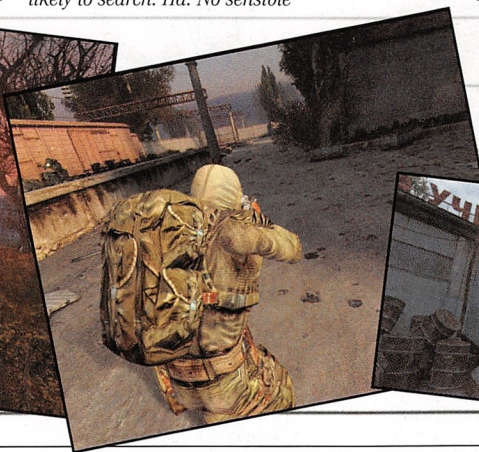
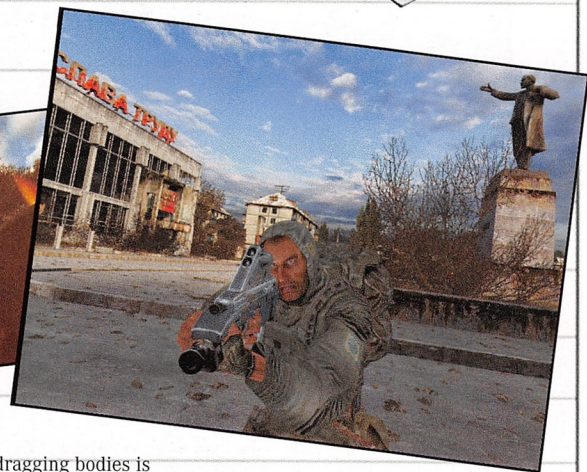
clothing and weaponry affecting the way a player will be affected.

Weapons have, for obvious reasons, been given similar attention as design takes in their real world counterparts to provide models that will enhance gameplay rather than feel like merely a new skin. Firing ranges are, of course, the most basic requirement yet this is only the start of what the physics engine must cope with. Some weapons will have greater penetration ability whilst others will have to take into account scatter ranges for burst shots. Then virtually any type of weapon can be modified with laser sights, muzzles or grenade launchers being added. Realism further dictates that weapons have limited life spans, misfire tendencies and so on which may lead the player to learn the maxim of "you get what you pay for" fairly early on. Add to this the inclusion of a fine assortment of bladed weapons and it will be a long time before you get to see the full range of impact types a body can take.

Vehicles too, have their own behaviours and to keep one working the player must remember fuel and damage levels. A vehicle provides for opening/closing doors, boot space and sometimes even glove compartments into which various inventory objects can be stored. Should a bullet hit a tyre when the vehicle is in movement the result might be that the vehicle is turned upside down or swerves to a halt. Drivers can also be killed directly, making for some dangerous consequences for the killer.

Physics are such an exciting area of game development, offering the player massively extended opportunities for interaction and gameplay. We have created a huge amount of detail within S.T.A.L.K.E.R adds immeasurably to the overall degree of realism offered.

Alexei Sytyanov, Game Designer



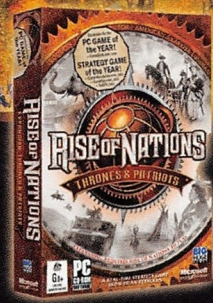
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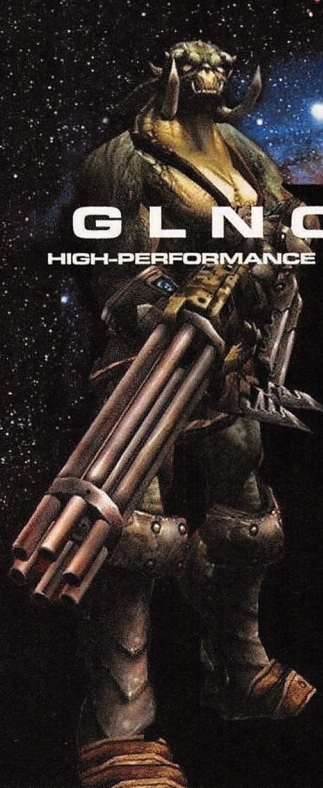
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MAKE HISTORY



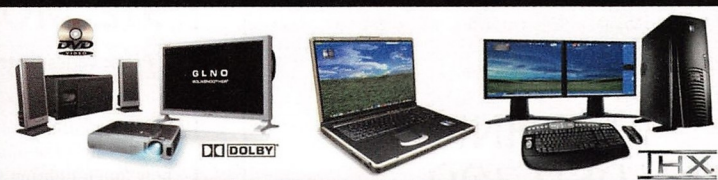
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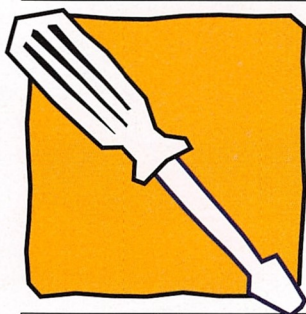
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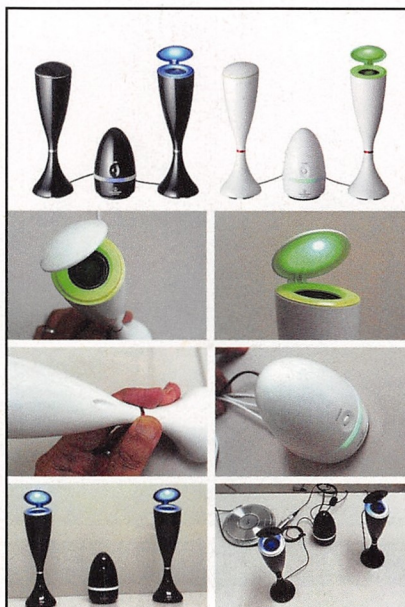
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HOTWARE

All the bits that we cram in at the last moment with Anthony Fordham



AUDIO TECHNICA DSP 300

Price: \$325 **Distributor:** Audio Cubes
Contact: www.audiocubes.com

Constant readers will remember the dear distant issue where I took a look at some crazily designed speakers from JBL. They looked incredibly swank, but they sounded like crud. Literally. Enter, then, Audio Technica's famous wineglass speaker design. Built especially for portable audio players, the DSP 300s feature full range bus reflect type speakers (we presume this is an important feature - the website mentioned it three times), 1100mW installed capacity plus 1100mW (JEITA), a 28mm bass driver and - most importantly - LEDs in the top of the speakers that light up under power. Has any set of speakers been designed more specifically for the style-conscious PC enthusiast? I mean, LEDs! It's fantastic! They come in both black and white, so why not get two sets? One for the kitchen, and one for your evil, midnight soul.

LEICA DIGILUX 2

Price: \$2,800 **Distributor:** Leica
Contact: www.leica-cameras.com

While I was going through my parents' storage bins the other day (don't ask) I came across a crazy camera they bought in Yugoslavia in 1972. Apart from the fact all the markings on it were in Cyrillic and the mechanism had long ago fused into an insensate lump of cast iron, it was a hell of a piece of machinery - and the styling was ultra-funky. They just don't make cameras like that any more. Or do they? Leica is a company that has a proud tradition of exchanging quality photographic equipment for outlandish lumps of cash, and the Digilux 2 is no exception. From the front, it looks like a classic 70s-era build-em-to-last-until-hell-freezes-over 35mm camera, but



flip it over and the reverse is encrusted with buttons and LCD screens and the rest of what we come to expect from high-end digital gear. It's a five megapixel camera, but the CMOS sensor is nearly as big as a 35mm frame, so expect some serious results. After all, you're spending serious money.

912 MOBILE PLATFORM

Price: Varies **Distributor:** White Box Robotics **Contact:** whiteboxrobotics.com

No matter how amazingly cool your case mod is, no matter how much lighting you shove inside or how many exploding skulls you screen-print on the panel with the sapphire crystal window, your PC will never be a robot that can follow you around the house. This unassailable fact preyed on the boffins at White Box Robotics for years until they finally decided to do something about it. To this end, they've designed a robot platform that uses ordinary PC parts inside a special case to create your very own baby R2-D2. The company insists the device, when configured

properly, will not only function as a normal PC but will also patrol your house looking for intruders, and SMS you at work to make you feel loved, at least by your PC.

The platform is designed with modding in mind, and White Box has already created a security-bot version (coloured bright yellow, you know, because yellow means security... doesn't it?) while calling for others to create their own funky machines. Sadly brain boiling lasers aren't yet included. Expect the 912 to be available by July.



MINITAR USB2.0 802.11G ADAPTOR

Price: \$99 **Distributor:** PC Range **Contact:** www.pcrange.biz



Meanwhile, back in the land of things you might actually be able to afford to buy and find a real use for, Minitar has released a USB2.0 adaptor for the currently fastest wireless standard 802.11g. This means you can get the full 54Mbps bandwidth without having to crack open your case. And face it, the only reason to crack open our cases these

days is to shove lights inside. We don't want to have to dirty our manicures with actual component work. Minitar's adaptor might not be that unique or even very interesting but at \$99 it basically hammers home the point that wired connections are on the way out, and if you ain't got wireless in your funky Newtown pad, you just ain't funk. Y. Or something. Get one anyway.

SHOTBLADE

Price: \$34 **Distributor:** Think Geek **Contact:** www.thinkgeek.com

Here at PCPP we like to encourage irresponsible behaviour as much as possible. As the old saying goes: "it's no fun until someone loses an eye." Enter the Shotblade. Others have tried to design a device that flings spinning plastic projectiles at people's faces, but none have managed to achieve the sheer velocity of the Shotblade. Apparently, it's inspired by the bullet-time sequences in the various Matrix films, although this is not immediately apparent to the casual observer... because they've just been blinded.

There are two types of projectiles: spiders and boomerangs. Spiders achieve maximum piercing impact over the shortest possible distance, while boomerangs can, with a little skill, be shot around corners.

It's products like this that make me glad I work from home.



SUBARU B9 SCRAMBLER

Price: Price: TBA **Distributor:** Subaru **Contact:** www.conceptcarz.com

Apparently this concept sports car answers the age-old question "why settle for a plain old roadster when you could have one with all-wheel-drive, a hybrid drive train, and variable ride-height suspension that can offer nearly eight inches of ground clearance for off-roading?" Call me



unsophisticated, but I thought the age-old question was "why can't I have one for free?" The Scrambler is among the first hybrid sports cars seen at this year's Tokyo Motor Show. Clever car companies are realising that using a hybrid electric/petrol engine not only improves fuel economy but actually

makes high-performance, high-cost vehicles more powerful and, most importantly, faster. The Scrambler - which, unfortunately, may never see production - flips the traditional hybrid paradigm by using electric for low speeds and petrol for high speeds, rather than the other way around. This means penis-envy conscious hotheads can rest assured that at 192kph their soobz will be going "RRRRROOOOM!" rather than "NEEEEEEEEE!" And really, isn't that what life is all about?

TAZ I MEDIA PLAYER

Price: TBA **Distributor:** Tight Systems **Contact:** www.tightsystems.com

Everyone from Sony to Big Kev expects the Walkman of the 21st Century to be the personal video player. And just like Big Kev, we're all excited to get our hands on one. Expect a first generation of huge, bulky, unreliable appliances to hit our shelves some time late this year or early next. The Sony PlayStation Portable will probably be an alright bit of kit, but how about this thing? The TAZ I claims to be able to carry 150 CDs, 20 hours of pre-recorded TV and 20 feature films all at once. The beast itself is quite hefty, having more in common with a brick rather than a credit-card, although this does allow for a larger than average screen and it can output HDTV to an appropriate set.

The 'ears' you can see on the picture are the unit's hard drive and a rather nifty removable MP3 player that holds bits of your music collection on an SD card.

We're promised a nine hour battery life, a 60GB



HDD and a final cost of less than \$1500 (assuming the Aussie dollar holds) so perhaps despite its chunk-tastic size and the version 1.0 gamble, the TAZ I may prove to be a worthy device indeed.

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OUT TO PLAY Timothy C. Best



Hit the Road Max

You might not know it from reading my column, but I'm quite a fan of comedy. I know that I watch Justin Timberland (*sic*) video clips and laugh my arse off. That being the case, it'll probably come as no surprise that I also find homicidal bunnies and Dragnet dogs hilarious too, which means LucasArts isn't my favourite company right now. The bums cancelled Sam & Max 2.

I'll confess right now, it's not like I even caught Sam & Max: Hit the Road the first time around. I'd like to claim that I was just too young, but the truth is that I was just too stupid. Since then I've seen the error of my ways and I've checked into the off-kilter vibe of this demented duo. I was writing an article about the game one Timberless day and I ended up reading through a transcript of the game and chuckling to myself. The game hadn't even gotten out of the opening credits and I already ran into this:

Max: "Mind if I drive?"

Sam: "Not if you don't mind me clawing at the dash and shrieking like a cheerleader."

Kids, if you don't get it, ask your cool uncle ... anyhow, I was hooked. When it got into the actual game and Sam gets a call and says, "Hello? Yes? Yes? Yes! No! Really? Well, the same to you, Mac!" slams down the phone and then explains it "was the Commissioner with another idiotic and baffling assignment," I knew things were just going to get better.

In short, it was a great game, with characters you'll never forget and banter that makes you wish they had a dog and rabbit writing the final season of Friends.

When the sequel was announced a lot of people found themselves chuckling at random moments when they remembered their favourite moments; the freelance police were far from forgotten. With an animated series hitting the cartoon airways, if anything, there was more recognition of the pugnacious pair this time around.

Things were looking good. Lucas had decided it was also time for the next Full Throttle game and the vocal talents of Bruce Campbell and Mark Hamill had already been locked in. There was even talk of another Day of the Tentacle game.

It looked like it was full steam

ahead for our advocates of excessive force and with new lines like, "Hello? Yes, Commissioner! Yes? Yes? Yes? Holy jumping mother o'God in a sidecar with chocolate jimmies and a lobster bib! WE'RE ON OUR WAY!", flowing out of development, we had quite a little party going on.

Then Full Throttle was pulled, with the short explanation that LucasArts was trying to deliver only the best games possible. Throttle was trying some oddball game mechanics so it wasn't too weird that it fell apart ... but where Throttle fell, Sam & Max was pushed.

Fans of the series found this by way of a cancellation message: "After careful evaluation of current market place realities and underlying economic considerations, we've decided that this was not the appropriate time to launch a graphic adventure on the PC."

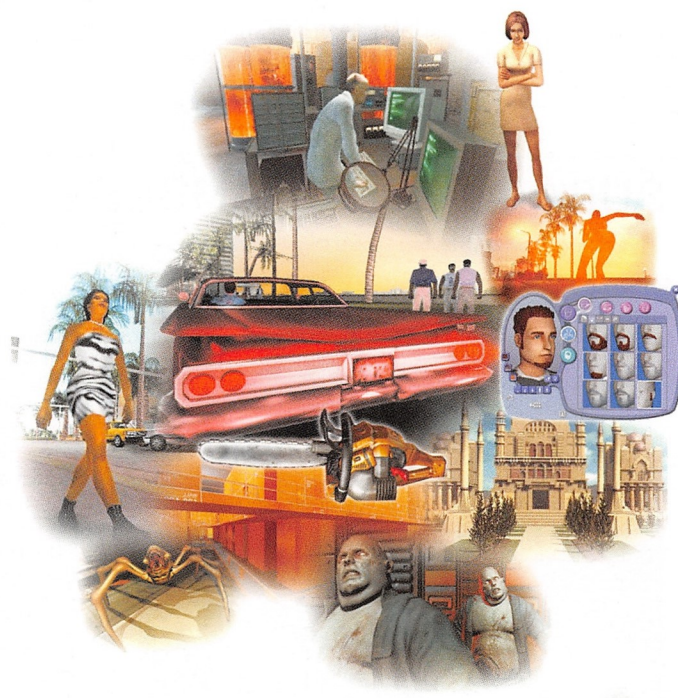
You'd think that they'd make an exception for this one.

Sam and Max are two of LucasArts' most memorable characters, for fans and developers alike, with the pair slipping into the credits of the N64 game Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire as Wompa trainers. So popular are the cultish couple that at the time of writing this, the online petition to save Freelance Police had already racked up well over 10,000 signatures. With cop shows being all of the rage you also have limitless potential for extreme parody and special brand Sam & Max gags.

Steve Purcell, the guy who gave life to Sam & Max in his comics, wrote to Mixnmojo saying, "LucasArts' sudden decision to stop production on Sam & Max is mystifying. Sam & Max was on schedule and coming together beautifully."

"I couldn't have been more pleased with the quality of the writing, gameplay, hilarious animation and the gorgeous 3D world that Mike Stemmle's team has created."

If it's not time for something like that then maybe Lucas's upcoming line up will tell us exactly what it is time for. If we sent in our Bothans we'd spy several things on the workbench including: the battlefield inspired Star Wars: Battlefront; the squad-based special forces game Republic Commando; and a console game called Mercenaries (a slightly futuristic real-world military shooter). It would seem



Banter that makes you wish they had a dog and rabbit writing the final season of Friends

that now is the time for shooters with a military spin, and if not them, then send in the clones for good measure.

Who'd have thought it? When isn't it time for shooters and a Galaxy Far, Far Away?

I'm not saying that just because LucasArts has this huge empire to fall back on and just because graphic adventures defined LucasArts as a creative powerhouse, that it is under any obligation to keep the tradition alive ... but, I do wonder, if LucasArts won't give these games love, who will?

Even when people were declaring adventure games dead back in 1998 they took a chance with the brilliant Grim Fandango which combined an average working-stiff Grim Reaper, a Mexican Day-of-the-Dead art style and a bizarre film noir tone. You can't tell me that there was actually a time for that game: it looked and felt like a labour of love.

I'd like to think that there's an outlandish graphic adventure barely contained at Lucas but it's more likely that we're just seeing one of those end-of-the-era things. In the early days of

games you didn't have flashy graphics, symphonic sound or the physics for realistic action to immerse you in other worlds. You had words and fairly pixelated ideas. The amazing thing about the graphic adventures like Sam & Max, Full Throttle, Monkey Island and Day of the Tentacle was that they did take you to other worlds, but they just used brute personality and charm to do it. If you were going to go through a whole game it was because every clue led you to something that'd make you smile and the game lived or died on that.

Having all of the technical wizardry is way cool - and I don't begrudge LucasArts expertly using it one iota - but I do feel a bunny-sized hole in my happy place looking over the Big L's list of upcoming games. It's like the company dug out its last set of odd little tinker hammers and wrenches and traded them in so that everyone can have power tools. A LucasArts adventure game was really something; a military-shooter by LucasArts set a few years down the track in Korea ... well, that's just a game.



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TECH TALK: Stuart Calvin



Maximum Specs

I'll gladly pay for any game that I find compelling and immersive. Having buddies that play games saves me time and money because I'm not going to lash out eighty nine or ninety nine smackers for what is obviously a boring game. Being "boring" rules out a lot of games; so does "stupid", "dumb", "critically flawed" as does exclaiming "WTF is the point of this game?!" five minutes into it.

Game developers have a lot to think about before they design a game and get around to developing and writing it. Like the logistician is the monkey on a tactician's back so is there a realist or what I call the VOR (voice of reason) on the developer's back. The VOR says that it's a "great game" but "the FX53 with three gig of memory is gagging on the opening credits". God only knows how the cut scenes would run. The VOR says that the minimum specs should be a Celeron 533 with 64MB of memory and an MX400 vid card. The marketeer neither understands nor cares - he or she is dreaming up new superlatives and hyperbole to describe the game that would give wordspy.com a run for its money. The fact that they wouldn't know their ass from their elbow in the gaming world is secondary to sales achievements. The lead programmer thinks that a 3.0GHz P4 should be the minimum and everyone else can get stuffed. The publisher just wants the game out on the street and doesn't give a rat's bum about minimum specs. Minimum specs for a decent 3D game have been creeping up to be around a six to seven hundred MHz PIII when really the minimum spec should be a 1000MHz Pentium or Athlon. But, I saw a 1.4 T-Bird, the doyen of gaming chips for so long, in action the other day with Prince of Persia. Neither the game nor the T-Bird were happy about their chance meeting. I'm tired of being deceived by minimum specs as are most of you. If the developers were realistic they'd come out early and say that this game will need, nay demand a high end system. If the

frickin' thing runs like a dog and looks like the proverbial breakfast on an average system then for god's sake tell me! If I had my way, games would not be allowed to creep over a hundred bucks for some time yet. All the game reviewers get together and average their scores (or you can just take our word for it). If it's a pig and scores 55 then they can't sell it for more than \$55. Easy, huh? If you like the genre go ahead and buy it. On the other hand, why not build a game that absolutely demands a high end system? I'd pay \$150 for an outstanding game that met the objectives of compelling and immersive game play. How would we react if the game needed a dual Opteron and a gig of sick DDR400? Dunno about you, but I could try that game out at work and let you know!

If you don't know what a great game looks like at 1600x1200 with fog, lighting, AA and AF wound up, do yourself a favour and get along to a store now. Ask for a demo, even Max Payne will do. The looks of a 3D game on a capable system are simply breath taking. A good vid card can do more geometry calculation than it took to first fly man to the moon. A good graphics engine will samba with the CPU and work out how much of the high-volume, repetitive work can be off loaded. But stupendous geometry calculation from a video card and a fabulous game engine isn't the be-all end-all for gaming. An irritating characteristic, in fact a defining characteristic of some games is a lack of strategic aim. Decide what that is in your own way but I think you know what I mean. IMHO, the aim has to be to compelling entertainment. I want to be involved, occasionally frustrated, destroyed mercilessly for elementary mistakes, be made supreme leader of the world and believe it, albeit briefly. I have to say that amassing weapons, health and whatever is wearing thin and I'm now up to the point where collecting wood, coal, iron and rock so I can build stuff is, frankly, pissing me off. Give me a command and conquer



game with a huge map but I get to start with a conventional army organisation. That is, two or more corps of two or more divisions each. I also want corps troops and div troops. I want to be able to fire organic corps artillery and counterstrike with armour and heavy guns. I also want the problems of supply and rear area protection.

One employs tanks for their shock action, firepower and manoeuvre - ah, if only it were true in-game. Tanks without tactics and supporting infantry are smoking, oily messes waiting to happen. Infantry without armour and artillery support are mince meat. Medium and heavy artillery can kill tanks. (Mind you, to do any good, you'd need something like III Corps Artillery out of Fort Sill Okalahoma, where the only wheeled gun in sight is concreted into the kids playground.) A battery of six field guns, in support of an infantry company, is not a problem for tanks but a regiment of field artillery will cause a bit of hurry-up. In the space of that field battery's firing time-on-target, a regiment or two of counter battery fire should be on its way. Gunners hate incoming fire, ask 'em, it just ruins their whole day. I want to be able to design and lay effective obstacles. Forget minefields, wire and ditches: think "blocking", "turning" and "stopping". The best obstacle is no obstacle if you can deceive the

enemy into moving onto the ground of your choice and destroy them in a combination of direct and indirect fire. How about setting up the ability to attack with armour and mechanised infantry on a converging axis? Add some prep fire on the objective after a quick milk run on surrounding key features. Puh! Incorporating even the most basic tactics and some operational level thinking into a game is going to require the ability to plug in comprehensive orders and code some outstanding AI. But I'm willing! Multi screen, multi dimensional, multi problem!

A game's minimum specs won't allow much of this to happen soon enough and current games have to get better, much better. No one wants to pay more than a hundred dollars for a game yet there's a niche market. That market may just be only me at the moment but the new paradigm is not limited to just war gaming. Policy analysts in the field of economics and human resources for example, will tell you that good policy doesn't have to be expensive. The best policy is one that works (funnily enough), is low cost and is high payoff. Similarly, some of the best games are the simplest in concept, design and delivery. I'm not advocating more expensive games but I'm ready for the one fifty or two hundred dollar game. How about you?

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THE GUERRILLA GAMER

A Century of Gaming

Correct me if I'm wrong but I believe it was delicious pop-tartlet Melissa George who, when asked if she felt the Australian TV industry had hit a low point, thanks to the reality-show obsessed new millennium, once replied: "Nonsense, the Australian TV industry has been this way for hundreds of years!"

Is there a point to this brief but spicy anecdote? I like to think so. This is the 100th issue of PCPP, but the magazine has only been around for eight years. And yet, to me it FEELS like I've lived through about century of gaming since this fine mag was first launched.

For instance, PCPP#1 (or should that now be PCPP#001?) had Duke Nukem 3D on the cover. Nowadays when I run naked into the street foaming at the mouth, many of the gamers I talk with have never even played Duke3D. To them, the blurry-porn theatre in the first level is little more than a distant memory, a footnote from the dawn of gaming. And yet, in Duke3D's day, I remember thinking that the graphics were pretty schmick, that the sound was the good stuff and the gameplay... well, Duke3D *uber alles*, as Public Enemy might once have sung.

Let's extend this idea a bit further. The detailed preparations I made for writing this very important 100th issue column for the even more important 100th issue magazine included digging out the rusting corpse of my 486SX, then driving it up to my parents' place where my old dad (who keeps everything - and I mean everything) still had the DOS 5.0 disks and (*Snip about 400 words of setting up an old PC - Ed*) and I was ready to play all the games that had defined my youth. For research and historical perspective, you understand.

So I busted them all out - Captain Comic, Fractured Reality, The Last Samurai, Doom, Dune 2, Wing Commander 2, Crystal Caves, Duke Nukem the whole bit. I played them for hours. And then I thought, surely, back in the early 90s games didn't really look this crap?

I was honestly surprised. My



Imagine my horror as I tried to comprehend how I could have spent actual money on 1942

memory of those dear distant school day afternoons blasting through hyperspace in Starcon 2 was of glorious graphics in rich, living colour. Smooth, detailed sprites. Inspiring tunes. Not bleeps, bleeps and blocky hieroglyphs.

What had happened? Had the mighty 3D accelerator destroyed my past with one fell swoop of its pixel shader? Had the sandy palms and gently swaying beaches of Far Cry somehow gone back in time and turned all my favourite games into mere dust and ashes?

I decided to widen my search. Somewhere, there had to be a game from the dawn of gaming that still held up today. I downloaded MAME and found a few ROMs of the arcade machines I'd punched so many 20-cent coins into during school swimming carnivals.

Imagine my horror as I tried to comprehend how I could have spent actual money on something like 1942. This so-called classic top-down shooter had seemed vertiginously real in 1993, almost like playing my

very own WW2-fighter themed cartoon. Today though, it looks like something knocked up by a first year Introduction to Programming tute.

Naturally, I fell immediately into a spiralling vortex of self-doubt. For the last eighteen months I have been - as you well know - pouring scorn on pretty much every title that has crossed the PCPP desk, as well as a few that fell unaccountably immediately into the garbage bag hung off the end. "Gaming used to be better in the olden days," I'd whine. "Remember all those classics like Gyruss? Man I loved Gyruss!"

Well, I may have loved Gyruss in 1988, but I played it again in 2004 and I felt the ghosts of all those unbowed bowling games crawling up my neck and cutting off the supply of oxygen to my brain. If I'd actually spent my Gyruss-time instead playing ten-pin bowls with the rest of my friends, I could be as good as Baby John Burgess by now and like him be demanding that ten-pin bowls be added to the list of Olympic sports.

Hmn - on second thoughts

THANK YOU GYRUSS. However, that doesn't change the fact that Gyruss is actually a pretty shit game.

Further implacable logical extension therefore shows that in 2014 there will be a generation of gamers and games journalists sitting in front of their 3D monitors playing the latest photo-realistic masterpiece developed by today's callow IT undergraduates, muttering, "Goddamn the crap games these days, I wish someone would write a game like Far Cry. That was the pinnacle of gaming." And then they'll go and boot up a creaking old 3GHz Pentium 4 ("My God, it uses ELECTRICITY!"), load their Far Cry DVD and splutter: "Holy crap, the textures aren't even in 3D, and there's no wind modelling!"

What's my point, though? Always with the point. It's an obsession with you people, I swear. I guess my point is that time heals all wounds. Or something like that anyway, because back in the early 90s we were just so glad to have a few games to choose from that we overlooked most - if not all - their shortcomings. Dune 2's interface was blisteringly slow and awkward (click on tank, click on menu, click on ground, repeat) but that didn't matter - at least we had an RTS!

Nowadays of course we have literally thousands of games to choose from on five different platforms (not counting weird imported handhelds like the GP32) and what's more we have thousands of hours a year that we assign to gaming without another thought. In the early 90s, gaming was a brave new frontier. Today it's just life. Today, a game has to do something more than just exist, so it's harder for today's games to impress us. But that doesn't mean the games of yesteryear were better. We were just more naive, is all.

The Guerrilla Gamer is a washed-up games journalist who hit his peak at least three years ago. He now spends most of his time eagerly awaiting the next MAME ROM to download over his 28k dial-up connection only to be bitterly crushed by the crapulence of the actual game.

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A working definition of PC Gaming

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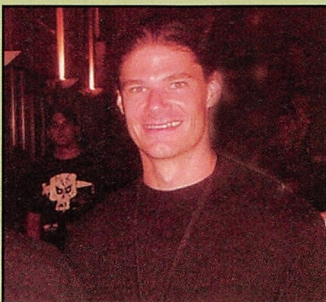
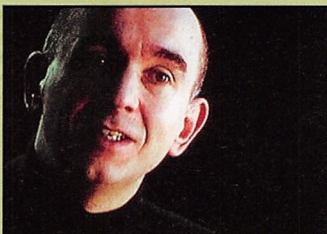
1

Stevie "Killcreek" Case getting massive breast implants and appearing nude in the pages of Playboy. We can only assume that everyone - including Killcreek, Hugh Hefner and his army of steely eyed business managers - thought it was a good idea at the time.



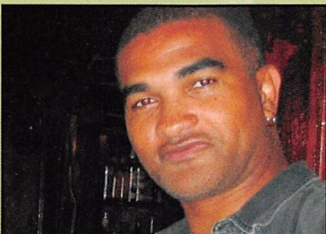
2

Peter Molyneux promising us a game world in Black & White where we would be able to do anything "physically sensible". Apparently, to Peter, the only physically sensible things to do are pick up trees and some rocks.



3

Todd Hollenshead telling a roving PCPP reporter that John Carmack was more than a 3D programming genius, because Carmack came up with the concept of demons invading a Martian space station, thus making him a narrative genius too.



4

Pretty much everything Derek Smart has ever done or said. Repeatedly blaming his publisher for any and all problems in his games. Trying, year in and year out, to produce a version of Battlecruiser that's playable. Getting a PhD.

What is PC gaming? Is this a question we can easily answer? Is PC gaming simply the denial of any and every console? Is it gaming on a platform that can do more than just play games? Is it, perhaps, about taking that endless gamble of buying a game that may or may not run properly on your particular piece of machinery?

Once, perhaps, these definitions may have been useful. But in today's exciting modern world, they don't necessarily hold up. PC gamers who profess a deep and abiding hatred for consoles will happily (often obsessively) run MAME and various SNES, C64 and Amiga emulators on their machines. Both the Xbox and the PS2 can do more than play games - perhaps not MUCH more, but still. And in a world where 'smart' gamers buy their favourites from dodgy Hong Kong and Singaporean software markets, spending \$5 on ten top games in shiny four-colour packaging doesn't necessarily guarantee that they will run on ANY console, or in fact not be hardcore civet-cat slasher porn. So what IS PC gaming, if no single definition will adequately serve us anymore? To PCPP at least, PC gaming is nothing less than the combined influence of hundreds of key moments in the continuing evolution of our hobby. PCPP has been covering PC gaming for 100 issues now, and in that time we've had many many memorable experiences.

Here then are 100 moments without which PC gaming would have been, not necessarily better or worse, but certainly a lesser experience. Some of these moments are brief blazing instants of greatness (or infamy), others represent endemic features of the hobby which continue to evolve and grow. Enjoy!

100 MOMENTS

100 MOMENTS

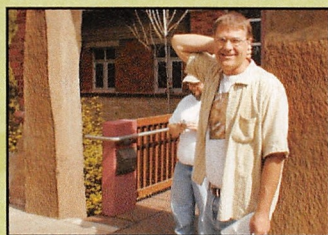
5

OldManMurray, possibly the world's greatest gaming site, reporting that the games of Roberta Williams had been banned in Australia because Roberta's husband is Satan and carries his enormous testicles around in a wheelbarrow.



6

Roberta Williams taking a vague interest in adventure games with graphics and turning it into a massive publishing empire that eventually grew so huge that only the mighty Vivendi itself could afford to buy it out.



7

Robin and Rand Miller spending nine thousand hours watching an early-model Silicon Graphics rendering machine painstakingly create hundreds of individual scenes for Myst, and then doing it all over again in even more detail for Riven.



8

Scott Adams programming a text adventure on the TRS-80 from scratch, and then using baby bottle liners to 'package' his cassette copies of Adventure, thus giving an army of marketing ghouls the idea of creating the commercial games industry.



9

Michael Denio programming Captain Comic and Captain Comic 2: Fractured Reality in EGA just to prove to a bunch of college buddies that PCs are capable of slick, colourful graphics just like the Amiga or C64.



10

Tom Wilson, who played bad-boy Biff in the Back to the Future movies, licking his lips and saying very importantly: "The word genius is banded about in Hollywood, but it sticks to Chris Roberts like glue."



11

Chris Roberts casting Mark Hamill in Wing Commander 3, and then finishing the game with a mission in which a space fighter flies through a narrow trench to shoot bombs into a small opening to destroy an entire planet. Think about it.



12

Richard Garriott building an actual haunted house and then opening it up once a year to Ultima fans, possibly as some kind of pre-emptive apology for the travesty of bugs and unfinished code that would eventually be released as Ultima IX.



13

Fred Ford and Paul Reiche III having to flee to the wilds of Alaska to prevent their publisher from forcing them to release an unfinished version of Starcon 2. The result is a retail disappointment, but spawns a cult following unlike any other.



► 1

The first time you saw Doom running on a department store PC

Remember before EB, when shops like Myer and Games Wizards had games running on in-store PCs and you could play them? Remember the first time you saw Doom running on one of these machines? The way the graphics seemed to just jump right out at you? The way the monsters seemed alive, even though they were just poorly animated sprites? The way the levels seemed RIGHT, like there was no better way to design them? That's when you knew PC gaming was really starting to go somewhere.



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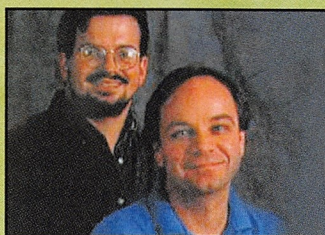
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100 MOMENTS



14

Sid Meier letting Brian Reynolds put both their names on Alpha Centauri, resulting in "Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri, a Brian Reynolds Game" and PCPP thereafter referring to all celebrity names in front game titles as "meiers".



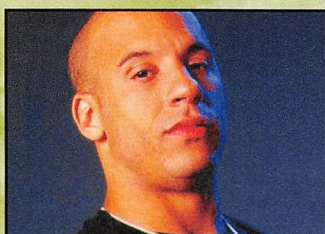
17

American McGee juxtaposing FMBs with sweet frilly petticoats and a pinafore on the 14-year-old character model of Alice, thus deeply confusing and traumatising a generation of previously pure-minded adolescent gamers. Actually she might have been 16, which would have been alright. For young gamers.



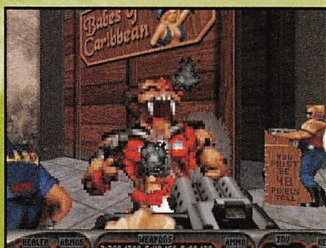
15

Clive Barker taking a bunch of over-eager developers with a horror fetish gently by the hand and quietly but firmly explaining that all their ideas are crap and that he should help them out. The result is Clive Barker's Undying, a retail disappointment, but Anthony really likes it.



16

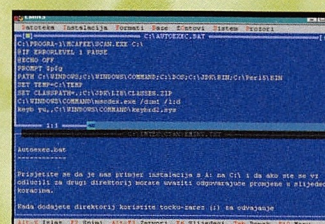
Vin Diesel's character in the forgettable movie XXX rebuffing a slick chick in a nightclub who wants him to license his name to a computer game. Then Vin Diesel in real life explaining that he is in fact going to license his name to a computer game. Any game. He doesn't care.



► 2

Realising that you had taken a side in the Quake vs Duke3D war

Sure, Quake was the first true 3D shooter, but Duke3D had topless dancers! Anyway, Quake was just so unrealistic. If you wanted to push a button you had to run up to it and push on it. In Duke3D, you simply press a button on the keyboard. You know, it lets you NOT push the button, if you don't want to. And what was with Quake's storyline? An evil presence invading the world through weird slippages? What crap! Duke3D's story was much more realistic: aliens invading Earth and stealing all our chicks.



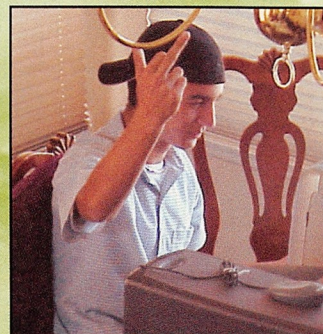
► 3

Inadvertently becoming a grand master at DOS configuration
If I were to mention the name "EMM386.EXE" to you, would you run screaming for the hills? Would you have terrible flashbacks if I asked about HIMEM.SYS? After hearing both these file names, are you now caught in an horrific cyclone of tortured memory? Are you picturing yourself seated at your redoubtable 486SX, using the DOS editor, valiantly trying to cram just one more TSR into high memory to free up one more block of that precious, precious 640K of low memory? And yet, after all that tinkering, Wing Commander still said "Expanded Memory Detected: Limited Music Will Play".

CULTURE

1

Screaming in almost incoherent rage at little shits who disconnect from your online Starcraft games, denying you a victory point, but then disconnecting yourself the next time you play in order to protect your 33-3-10 record.

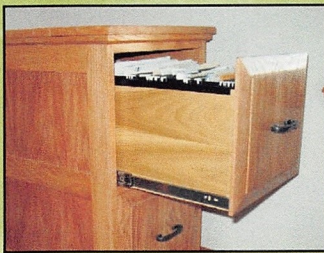


19

John Romero pissing away a respected and powerful position at one of the world's most influential developers, presumably on the advice of his huge-breasted girlfriend, and eventually ending up programming Java games for mobile phones and marrying a Russian teen.

20

Duke Nukem parading through three official games in a skin-tight orange singlet, Ray-Bans and dyed blonde flattop, smirking suggestively, carrying big phallic guns and yet somehow managing not to become a gay icon.



2

Having an old filing cabinet jammed full of photocopied manuals of games like Hero Quest, Falcon 3, Space Quest 4, Starcon and anything else that has copy protection in the manner of "Enter the third word from the fifth paragraph of page 63."



3

Thinking Doom is the most shockingly violent game you've ever seen, then thinking Carmageddon is the most shockingly violent game you've ever seen, then thinking the censors are impeding your free speech by banning GTA3.

4

Spending Y2K sitting in your basement carport or garage with your model train layout in the background, playing Sid Meier's Gettysburg on a 486DX which has at least ten other hex-based strategy games on its 125MB hard drive.

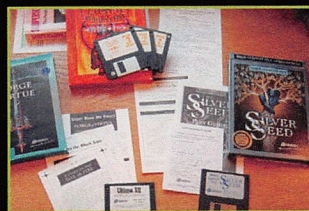
5

Going to a 200-person LAN party with the full intention of spending the entire long weekend playing games games games, but in fact spending the entire long weekend leeching porn and DivX movies from other people's PCs.

► 4

Spending \$400 on a Maths Co-Processor

Perhaps this kind of thing seems small-fry compared to spending \$1000 on a new video card, but back in the days of the 386 we couldn't take our Floating Point Units for granted. If we wanted to run Doom at a decent detail level, we had to buy an FPU and plug it into the motherboard. However, the maths co-processor marked the true beginning of the never-ending upgrade cycle for the PC. You can ALWAYS buy some little, expensive thing to make your machine run slightly faster. You fools.



6

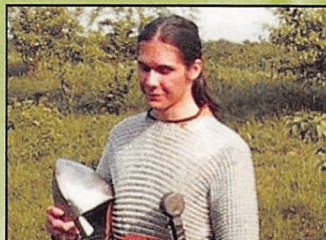
Lusting hopelessly after an impossible-to-afford \$88 copy of Civilization 2 when you're 13, then when you're 23 casually tossing down \$170 on a couple of titles you're vaguely interested in and then hardly even play.

7

Sitting around in trendy inner-city gaming cafes with your BA Phil. mates expressing your mutual amazement over how you used to cheerfully pay \$50 for "speech packs" that added a tiny amount of digitised dialogue to your favourite games.

8

Rushing down to your favourite games retail outlet to pick up your guaranteed copy of Duke Nukem Forever / Team Fortress 2 / Hidden & Dangerous 2 / Prey only to find that yet again the game has been delayed indefinitely.



9

Getting into a bloody fistfight in the schoolyard after arguing at an increasingly ferocious pitch about

which game is better: Baldur's Gate 2 or Planescape Torment. Then punching out the little kid who likes Dungeon Siege.

10

Sifting through hundreds of online Warcraft 3 games looking for one that says OMG 7-ON-1 COMP RUSH NO LAG and then, once you've joined the game, using a map hack to make your victory even more stupidly assured.



11

Reading in a newspaper about some kid in South-East Asia who spent so long playing in a games cafe that he eventually staggered to the bathroom, collapsed and died from starvation/thirst/exploded kidneys. Then shrugging and booting up Diablo 2.

12

Knowing full well that EverQuest is nothing but a digital drug designed so that the developers can put in the minimum possible effort and still pull the highest possible amount in subscription fees, yet still being unable to stop playing.



► 5

Downloading pr0n on a 900 baud modem

If you're old enough, don't pretend you didn't do it. There was no Internet back then, for civilians anyway, so you had to get your smut from bulletin boards, the ubiquitous BBSS. So then, you would sit in your mate's grotty garage, grunting and giggling as his 286 slowly, painfully extruded a badly digitised picture of some eighties bikini model with no top. "I can see a nipple!" he would triumphantly shout. What does this have to do with great moments in PC gaming? Don't pretend you don't know.

100 MOMENTS

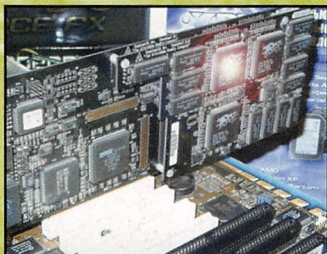


13

Spending the whole weekend tearing apart your study and moving your PC into your dining room (much to your wife's disgust) to play networked games with your work colleague who then rings up at three o'clock Sunday to say he can't come.

14

Driving down to a PC hardware wholesaler before work on a Thursday and then standing with seven other spotty, greasy guys while the staff crack open an enormous shipping crate which contains your new \$1000 video card.



▶ 7

The first time you played Incoming using a Voodoo2 3D accelerator
You thought you understood PC graphics. You thought you knew what to expect. You had resigned yourself to a lifetime of 256 colour VGA and the occasional SVGA game that could do some limited palette swapping. Then you went and bought your first 3D accelerator, and it came with a game called Incoming. The game was a moronic space-invaders clone, but the graphics! The lighting effects! The expanding clouds of vapour! And the resolution! Once you go 800x600, you never want to go back.



15

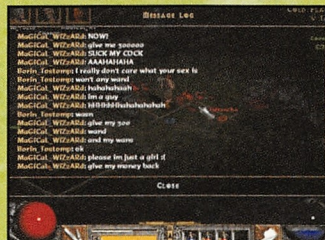
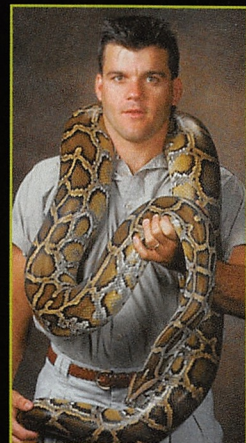
Starting a semester at university determined to get ahead on all your assignments so it will leave you plenty of quality time for gaming. Then deciding to have just one go at Call of Duty. Then failing everything except COMP1200 Introduction to Computing.

16

Going to your local library and borrowing those weird Usborne programming books to make games for your dad's AT, and then realising that all the BASIC code in them is for things like the BBC, the Amstrad or the Microbee.

▶ 6

Running a 'slowing utility' on your XT to play Sammy the Snake
Yes, even in the dim mists of prehistory, games refused to run properly on PCs. Of course, back then in the early 90s, the problem was usually that the machine was much too fast for the game. Sammy the Snake was merely one of a dozen examples. Playing Wing Commander on a 486DX was another. Fortunately, there was a useful TURBO button on most PCs to drop the clock speed. Nowadays of course, your hardware is lucky to keep up with the latest releases for even nine months before collapsing in a heap and costing you \$1500 to upgrade.



17

Being called a lamer online because you're either not good enough at a game, not good enough at some obscure skill in a game, too fond of a particular weapon, not fond enough of a particular weapon, have too high a ping or are too good.

18

Logging on to a server with a ping of 128 and seeing everyone else with pings of 40-70 and wistfully wishing

for the grand old days of the first Quake servers, where people used to call you a Low Ping Bastard, as if it was your fault.



19

Searching the Internet for FAQs for your favourite RTS game only to find documents full of bizarre unfamiliar terms and instructions like "Build bk, then twr, then two gr and then creep" and eventually having to stoop so low as to read the game's manual.

▶ 8

Figuring out how to use the mouse for FPS, and entering a whole new world
Can you remember the day you switched from keyboard to mouse? Perhaps you're too young - well then listen up sonny. Most of us played Doom using just the arrow keys and a strafing toggle key. Turning quickly? Forget about it. Eventually, a bunch of geniuses figured out how to use the mouse to turn the player, and it was all over. There were still people playing Quake using keyboard only, but a couple of months being mercilessly fricasseed by mousers soon changed their strangely retro ways.



Pro RUGBY Manager

Experience the thrills of managing some of the greatest World rugby teams and participate in many of the worlds major domestic and international championships and tournaments. Incorporating a comprehensive and easy to follow management system, with an innovative fully 3D game engine, Pro Rugby Manager puts you in complete control of every stage.

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Participate in all the major competitions from the 10 National championships to the Super 12, Tri-Nations, Six Nations, European Cups and The World Cup. Choose from over 100 Clubs and 50 National teams.

- **Authentic stadiums:**
Experience 14 authentic 3D stadiums.

- **Management aspects:**
Feel the intense real-life pressures of a manager with key decisions such as the hiring and firing, real-time game decisions and financial balancing.

- **Realistic and fluid animations:**
Motion captured players allow for realistic animations and immersion into the bone-crushing thrills of Rugby.

- **Real time interactive simulation:**
Once your prepared, the team play the game in glorious 3D. Make tactical changes and control players movements.

- **Realistic tactics and strategies:**
Select your starting 15, assign tactics and strategies and watch them carry it out.

- **Weather effects:**
Weather will affect match conditions and crowd turn out that will affect profits and the way your game will played out.

- **Multiplayer functions:**
Play with up to 2 players in real-time Online (Gamespy) or LAN. Set up leagues Online or LAN over multiple seasons for up to 100 players and watch your progress unfold in style with a Worldwide Online ladder system.



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100 MOMENTS

20

Desperately and fruitlessly trying to convince console evangelists that PC is better because the hardware is non-standard, there are now fewer games, it takes upwards of five minutes to go from off to playing, some games crash inexplicably and the machine is ten times more expensive.

TECHNOLOGY

1

"My name is Dr Sbaits, please speak what is in your mind freely. Our conversation will be held in strict confidence. Memory contents will be wiped off after you leave." - "Doctor, I'm having impure thoughts about my cousin." - "Do you your cousin often?" - "You filthy swine!"



► 9

Gleefully reading that Daikatana sucked
Admit it, John Romero prejudiced you against his own game from the outset by demanding that you "suck it down" and then trademarking the phrase, just to ram it home. Eventually he released the game, late, and it wasn't so much that Daikatana was awful but that it was completely unremarkable in every way. The opening levels kind of sucked. The rest of the game was kind of okay. A few weeks later, everyone except embittered PC journalists had forgotten about it. And this amused you.



2

Wondering whether or not your 2MB video card is VESA compatible, and then wondering whether or not The 7th Guest is actually a good enough game to justify upgrading your video card. I mean, upgrade your video card? That's crazy!

3

Visiting your local Dick Smith's once a month to buy a new joystick, because the plasticky chunks of crap you keep buying shatter into dozens of razor-sharp shards about five hours into a spirited multiplayer game of Falcon 4.



4

Being jealous of your neighbour's 8MB video card that can pump out an astounding 65536 colours, then saving up \$500 to buy one of your own and using it to play King's Quest IV in 256 colour mode.

5

Trying to configure the wave driver on a high-end SoundBlaster AWE32 so you can listen to the amazing MIDI music in Strike Commander, even though the sound card doesn't support half the instruments used in the game.



► 10

Peering myopically at minimum system requirements on the bottom of the box

As has been said in this magazine before, go into any games store and you'll see twenty kids fighting over the last ten copies of GTA: Vice City (or perhaps nine girls fighting over a single copy of Final Fantasy X-2) for PS2, while up the back of the shop three or four PC gamers are peering at the bottom of boxes trying to figure out which parts of the "minimum system requirements" are in fact lies on the part of the publisher to sell more copies. As far as our research can determine, no PC gamer has ever purchased a game at retail with full confidence that it will actually work on their machine.



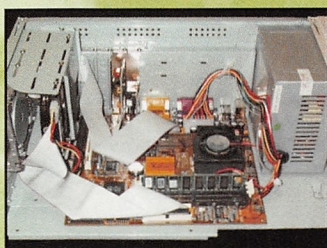
6

Spending \$650 on a high-end video card so your PlayStation 2 emulator runs more smoothly, even though actual PS2s currently cost \$299. Also, using a P4-2GHz machine to run a SNES emulator because "the games are better."

7

Complaining that the Atari ST and the Commodore 64 are much more

impressive pieces of computer engineering that the "hybrid piece of shit" that is a PC, while sitting in front of a 21 inch monitor playing Unreal Tournament 2004 at 1600x1200x32 with 8x anti-aliasing.

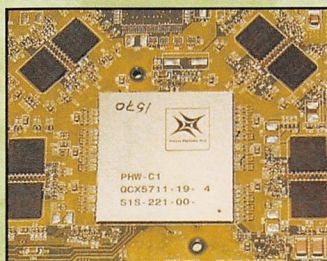


8

Slicing open the fleshy part of your thumb while trying to install a PCI card in a cheap ATX case, then getting blood all over the sensitive electronics while you put the screws back in. And then bragging about it to your mates.

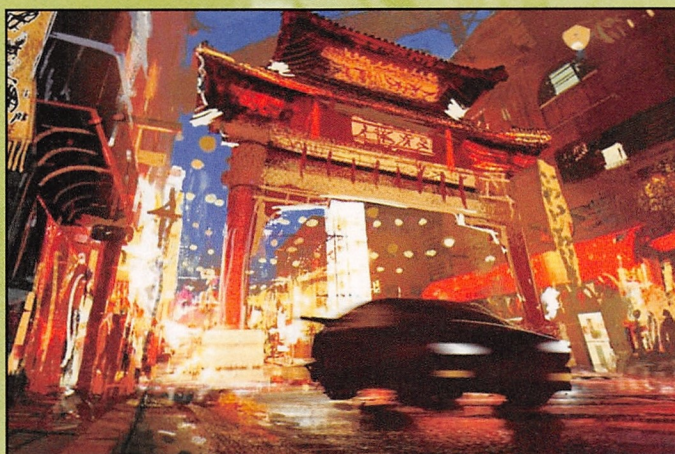
9

IBM releasing the Pentium CPU, which it claimed to be the next big thing in computing, without realising that the first batch actually generated errors in some floating-point calculations. Fortunately, consumers hungry for the next-big-thing didn't seem to care.



10

Matrox creating a long and distinguished line of fantastic graphics adaptors until the day 3D suddenly became important, whereupon the company took a nose dive in the consumer market. Then eventually releasing the 3D 'powerhouse' Parhelia, to widespread ridicule.

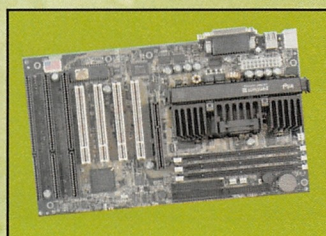


11

Trying to control a high-performance motor vehicle using a keyboard Honestly, has anyone ever in the history of gaming been able to do this with any degree of elan? Every tiny correction causes your \$200,000 street machine to spin off into the bleachers. While console gamers suavely take switchbacks and hairpins using their analogue thumbsticks and triggers, you bluster and curse at the likes of Need For Speed: Underground for being completely impossible to deal with. Then you go and buy a gamepad or racing wheel, thus effectively turning your PC into a rather expensive console.

11

Creative Labs standing back and watching the video card wars and sequentially backing first 3Dfx, then Nvidia, and now ATI in an attempt to find some kind of happy medium. In the meantime, establishing a monopoly over the sound card sector.



12

Going down the shops in 1999 to upgrade your Pentium Pro to a newly released Pentium III, and realising that the new ATX case standard means you can't just buy a new mobo and CPU, but actually need a whole new PC.

13

Packing your PC so full of EL cable, UV lamps, glowing fans and blinking LEDs that pilots of long-haul international freight jets try to line up with your bedroom for a final approach, but the sound of their engines is drowned out by your CPU fan.



14

Sitting on the floor of your bedroom holding your breath as you try to bend all the pins on your CPU back upright after your unfeasibly massive heat sink stuck to the top of the chip and ripped it out of the mobo with the locking arm still down.

MB Temperature:	26°C/78°F
CPU Temperature:	32.5°C/89.5°F
JTPWR Temperature:	[Ignore]
CPU Fan Speed:	3375RPM
Power Fan Speed:	[Ignore]
Chassis Fan Speed:	N/A
VCORE Voltage:	1.60V
+3.3V Voltage:	3.52V

12

Disabling a temperature alarm to squeeze 8 more MHz out of your groaning CPU One thing we certainly have over console gamers is that if we don't like the performance of our PC we can more or less hit it with a stick until it runs faster. However, this practice has always been fraught with danger - injudicious FSB settings can cause your mighty machine to lock and fry, and if you disable the wrong fan, well. Fortunately, most BIOSs now have built-in alarms to alert the unskilled user that their PC is about to enter first-stage meltdown. Unfortunately, a lot of crazy bastards disable these alarms.

100 MOMENTS

15

Lying in bed late at night staring at the ceiling and wondering just what kind of perverse acts your best mate at school had to commit in order to afford the throbbing Radeon 9800 XT that now nestles inside his machine.

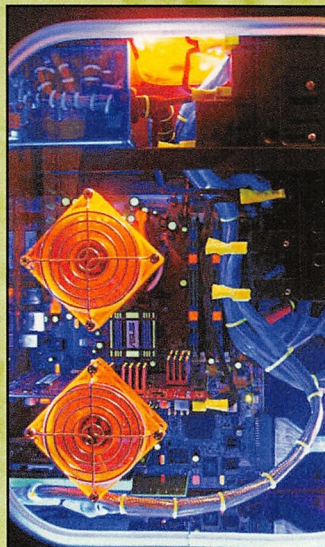


16

Being laughed at by weird PC shop guys with strange hair and skin diseases when you admit that the reason your motherboard is completely stuffed is because you tried to do a BIOS flash for no particular reason.

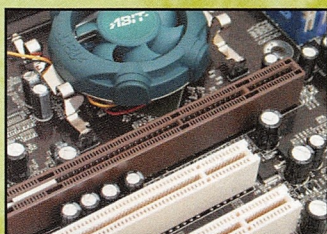
17

Standing in a Dick Smith's Powerhouse with your mother, trying not to scream as the sales assistant explains to her that Package X is the best machine for her home office because it has "the USB".



► 14

The invention of AGP and the video card wars
Haven't the video card wars been fun? If you're rich, they've been a godsend, because ever since the PC got its own dedicated graphics port, manufacturers have been able to churn out ridiculously powerful video cards that can do all kinds of amazing tricks. On the other hand, if you're not rich, perhaps you're resenting the fact that if you wanted to stay cutting edge for any length of time, you'd have to drop at least \$800 on a new video card every twelve to eighteen months. Perhaps even, you look on with vicious glee as Nvidia - who took so much money from you - gets shagged by ATI.



► 13

The day PS2 game sales exceeded PC game sales

Where were you when this happened? Did you, like me, have to run home and climb into bed with a box of tissues and a block of chocolate, and sob hysterically as you had your cousin load up and play all the classic blockbusters of yesteryear - Ultima IV, X-Wing Alliance, Red Alert, Powerslide etc - even as you wailed and gnashed your teeth? It's true - the only thing that now keeps PC game sales up there with the top consoles is that so many units get shifted for \$9.95. Yes, just like you used to, the new generation of PC gamers are playing titles from 1996.



18

Coming home from a computer fair with a fan bus, a voltage monitor with light up dial, four UV IDE cables, a bright red rounded floppy cable, some LEDs that flash when you whistle, and wondering if you should have actually spent all that cash on games.

19

Reading a glossy sales pamphlet in a dingy PC showroom and worrying that the GeForce might not be as good as the TNT2 because after all, it's not called a TNT3 now is it? Have they got something to hide? What's the story?



GAMES

1

Using a Quad-damaged rocket launcher on a shambler and watching its head bounce around the room while gibbs and blood magically fountain out of thin air,



20

Buying any PC component at any price and then going back to the shop on a whim six weeks later to find the component for at least \$100 less, while the component at the original price now does whatever it does at twice the speed, and with more lightning bolts.

and being reminded of the noise gibbed imps used to make in Doom.

2

Discovering in Dune 2 that spice harvesters can run over troopers, and in fact leave a tiny little mangled trooper and a splodge of gore in the sand, which slowly fades

Yu Yu Hakusho - Dragonball Z meets Ghostbusters!

Yu Yu Hakusho chronicles the adventures of 14-year-old Yusuke, a rebellious teen given a second chance when he becomes a Spirit Detective.

Don't miss this brand new smash from the creators of **Dragonball Z**!



"Yu Yu Hakusho is the next truly big series" **Anime on DVD**



A Demonic Enterprise...

SAKURA WARS

THE MOVIE

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Anime on DVD

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The Imperial Fighting Troupe is called again to defend Tokyo against the demons.

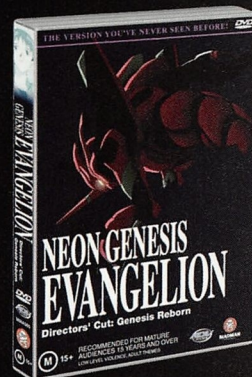


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The greatest anime series of all time - just got better!

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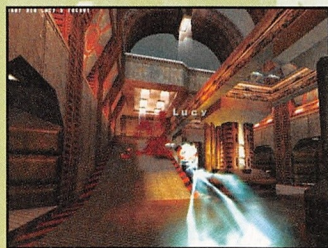
and all good independents



MADMAN
ENTERTAINMENT

100 MOMENTS

to a dusty outline. Not bad work from a mere 12 pixels.



3

Investing hundreds of hours practicing against Hardcore bots in Quake 3, setting up devilish macros that fling three rockets and a grenade with the press of a single key, and then going online to be crushed by an idiot-savant fifteen year old from Texas.

4

Trying desperately to convince your non-Soccer-mad mates that the seemingly endless series of Championship Manager games are all really amazingly awesome despite the fact the games appear to have no graphics at all. Then going off in a sulk to play multiplayer with your "real friends".



► 15

Games on multiple disks, and then games on multiple CDs
If only one thing truly separates PC gaming from the consoles, it's disc-swapping. Sure, there might be the occasional obscure Japanese RPG on PS2 that has more than one disc, but for the most part, on console you just stick it in and away you go. On PC, everything from Phantasmagoria (7 CDs) to Baldur's Gate (5 CDs) has multiple discs. Back in the good old days of course, we had multiple 3.5" floppies, which made for tedious installations. Nowadays, actual play is tedious, as the game constantly asks us for the next disc. Riven is the very worst example of this.



5

Beating at a headcrab with a crowbar while shrilly cursing your PC for not being able to keep a sufficiently high frame rate to enable you to take proper aim. Also, being so nerdy you wished you looked like Gordon Freeman.

► 16

Demos that get released months after the game hits shelves

Okay, so I guess we should be grateful that we get demos at all, unlike those poor console suckers who have to buy official magazines if they want to try before they buy. And for a while there, demos were great. But then Blizzard started a new trend - only releasing the demo after the game had been on shelves for at least three months. What's that about? Are these companies afraid that people won't buy their games if they see how much the demos suck? I bet Ion Storm is thinking about it, now.



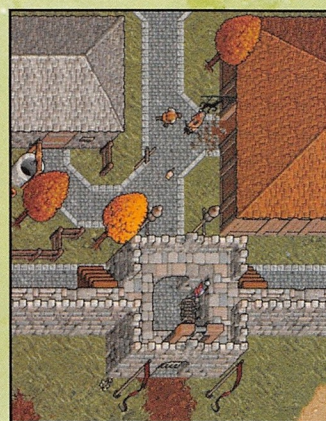
6

Pressing a complicated selection of keys in order to target a gigantic triangular polygon and yet, thanks to awesome sound effects and authentic music, easily believing that you're actually sweeping down on a Star Destroyer.



8

Booting up Descent for the first time, commenting that the game actually has real 3D architecture instead of Doom's 'pretend' 3D, shooting a bunch of really cool robots, and then vomiting copiously as the motion sickness really kicks in.

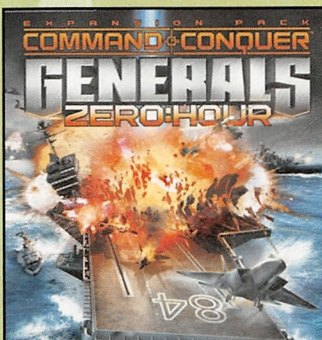


9

Knowing that you really should be in pursuit of the virtues and trying to become the Avatar and save Britannia, but somehow being unable to stop repetitively baking bread and giving it to street urchins.

10

Rushing to the computer room at lunch time because someone put a pirated copy of the original Prince of Persia on half the machines, and even if you don't get to play yourself, you can still watch the "amazing animation."



► 17

Expansion packs

Something else PC gamers have that console gamers are unlikely to ever enjoy, especially since Microsoft has nixed the HDD on the next Xbox, is the expansion pack. We go down to the shops in a fit of nobility to actually buy a legitimate copy of a game, and we drag it home to find it doesn't actually have that much content. Fortunately (and I use the term advisedly) an expansion pack for the game will undoubtedly get released a few months later. Are we being shagged for another \$50 here? Or are expansion packs what truly set us apart from the consoles? It's difficult to say, when packs range from Half-Life Blue Shift (five hours play) to Generals: Zero Hour, which rocks.



11

Sitting open-mouthed in astonishment when your older neighbour informs you that the copy of Wing Commander he's making for you will actually take up nearly three whole floppy disks, and will need extensive configuration for "full music to play".

12

Explaining to a Macintosh enthusiast that Doom 3 will have amazing levels of detail, real time dynamic lights, stencil shadows and the best bump-mapping ever, and having them reply: "Yeah, but did you ever see Myst? Now that had good graphics!"



13

Learning every single exploit for every major online shooter such as rocket-jumping in Quake and skiing in Tribes, practicing them for hundreds of hours, and then going online to be crushed by an idiot-savant fifteen year old from Wyoming.

14

Stepping onto a Counter-Strike server all psyched for an afternoon of quality gaming, only to find that everyone else on the map is running around in circles looking at the floor and calling you a "llama haXor".



15

Being wowed by the nebula effects in a series of space games such as I-



► 18

Westwood finally 'selling out' to Electronic Arts

Say what you like about other obscure titles that did it first, Westwood surely brought RTS into the mainstream and created one of the most cloned-up genres ever. From Dune 2 to Red Alert, the developer was unstoppable. Tiberian Sun was rather less impressive, but Red Alert 2 was great fun. Then, after Emperor, it all seemed to be over - the developer was dissolved, assimilated into the great collective that it EA. The fans wailed. Then EA released C&C Generals, one of the best high-action RTS games ever. The spirit of Westwood lives on.

100 MOMENTS

War and Homeworld, telling all your friends how awesome the graphics are, but never admitting you only played each game for about 20 minutes before getting bored.

16

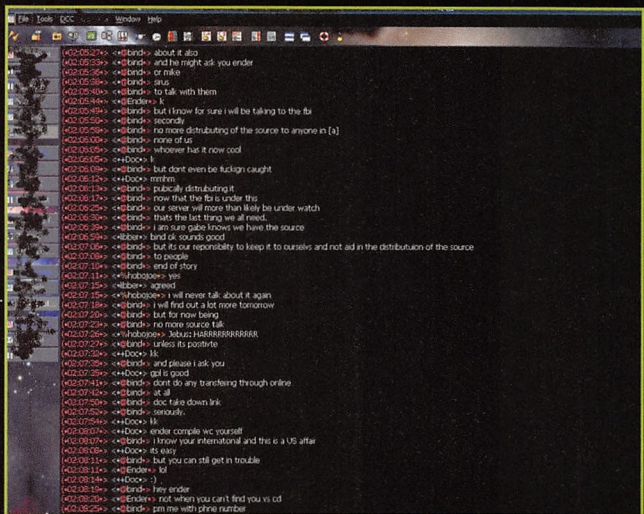
Downloading a patch to remove Delphi's top in Giants: Citizen Kabuto, and then giggling insanely every time you play. Later, renaming the executable in the Dawn Nvidia demo to see a nude version, and once again giggling insanely.



► 20

Theft of source code

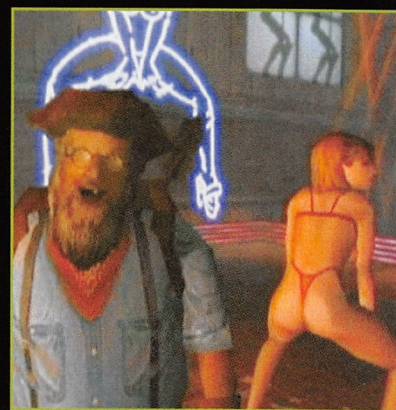
It's funny, but when the Doom 3 Alpha was leaked, we couldn't download and play it fast enough. But then when the Half-Life 2 code was stolen, we felt robbed ourselves. Subsequently, a World of Warcraft build has escaped onto the Internet, leaving us puzzled as to what the thieves could possibly hope to do with it. Of course, the more cynical among us wonder if some of these leaks are entirely accidental, since publicity for the game immediately skyrocketed. Who can say? Just hurry up and finish the damn games, already.



► 19

The Duke Nukem Forever E3 Video

This moment probably drove home the whole debacle that is DNF. We say to 3D Realms, why not just let the Duke die? Why this pretence that the game is still in development? Are there a couple of dusty machines in the back of the Max Payne offices that have half a build of DNF on them? Still, as Derek Smart pointed



out, without DNF the PC games industry would be a poorer place indeed, culturally-speaking. DNF serves as a warning to developers against the whole milieu of the biz - don't promote, don't promise, don't reveal, don't admit anything.

17

Using a hex editor to hack your Command & Conquer savegame without understanding twos-complement binary notation, searching for your credit value, replacing it with FFFF and finding your 2000 credits have somehow become -65535 credits.

19

ridiculing other CS players for repeatedly jumping or 'bunny hopping' during a round, and then doing it yourself when you finally work out that it does in fact make you a hell of a lot harder to hit.

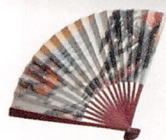
20

18

Trying all your different German death metal albums in your CD-ROM drive to discover which one has just the right blend of incoherent demonic grunting and wailing guitars to make your next Quake deathmatch perfect.

Complaining that the Chinese in C&C Generals are too hard to play in singleplayer, then bothering to read the manual and find out that you can build speaker towers on Overlord tanks, then complaining that the Chinese are now too easy.





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GAMES IN PREVIEW

Enough nostalgia already, let's look to the future.

So who's excited about E3? I know I am. Around this time each time there's a nervous buzz throughout the industry. It usually begins in March as our keen ears catch the first murmurings of new titles. (BG3? NWN2? Supreme what?) The whispers grow louder throughout April (*Ghost Recon 2...Unreal Assault ...*), though you've got to be careful to block out the noise of many an April Fool (*Prince of Persia: Back to Baghdad*). Come May and the rumour mill is in full swing as we prepare to pack our bags for the long flight to Los Angeles.

To a certain extent every E3 is the same. However, this year I've noticed one perceptible difference already: I don't really have any idea what I'm going to be seeing. Most years you can plan in advance - sure there's always a surprise announcement or two, but you generally know what you're in for. This year, as I write a month out from the event, I can probably count on two hands (and maybe a foot) what titles I'm definitely going to see. That's not a lot at a show where hundreds, if not thousands, of games vie for your attention.

Are we witnessing a change in the way games are promoted and marketed? Are we starting to see publishers choosing to delay revealing new titles until much closer to release? If so, I'm not sure it's going to succeed.

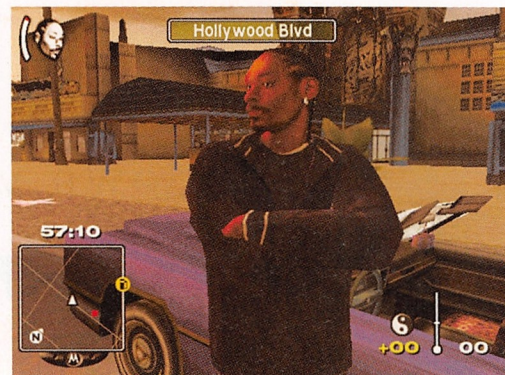
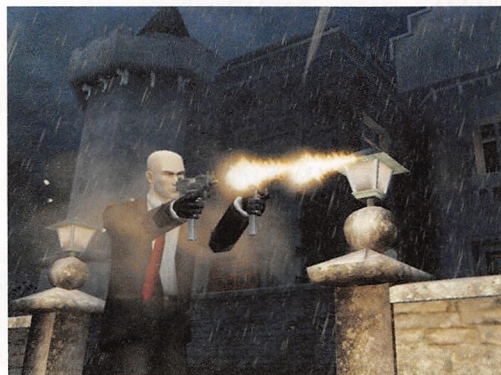
Rockstar elected to hold back unveiling its two big releases of last Christmas until barely a few months out from launch; in the end neither *Max Payne 2* nor *Manhunt* sold as well as perhaps may have been expected. Meanwhile EA continues to dominate sales charts not just through its established franchises but by a firm grasp of the concept of "pre-awareness".

Perhaps we're seeing the industry finally follow through on its oft-stated promise of quality-over-quantity release schedules? Or maybe they're just getting better at keeping secrets? We'll find out at E3...

David Wildgoose,
Editor



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It's a gas



- 45** *Ground Control: Operation Exodus*
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- 52** Mini Previews





Ground Control: Operation Exodus

Just be careful not to let them in the air...



This time around, there's an alien race thrown into the mix - the greasy-looking Virons. Interfering in a colonial conflict you're mixed up in, the Virons fire glowing energy matter at their enemies and use the ubiquitous sci-fi "bio tech" to augment themselves and their weapons. Their most notable feature is the ability to "Meld", or combine two units of the same kind, ala Homeworld Cataclysm. Massive were tight-lipped about what exactly this meant, but potentially you'll be able to Meld, then "defrost" your units back into their smaller components.



One of the first few experimentally 3D RTS games, the original Ground Control put players in the midst of a colonial revolution in the edges of known space. Created by Swedish developer Massive Entertainment, it focused on tactics and combat strategy, often giving you a limited force of units for each mission, pre-chosen at the beginning. A key feature was that units always faced a particular direction and have better armour in the front than the rear and sides, making out-flanking tactics crucial to success.

With Ground Control 2 soon to launch, we got a hands-on session with the beta and spoke to Massive Entertainment CEO, Martin Walfisz during his press tour in Sydney. We began by asking about the new resource in the game, Acquisition Points, created by holding Landing Zones and Victory Locations.

"Well, the idea is to make sure that there are some tactical locations on the map that you will always want to control," says Walfisz. "So that instead of just allowing people to just camp in their own base, or find a place on the map they like and just stay there, we try want to reward players who play more actively, who are more aggressive than defensive."

Can you explain the game's deployment system for us? Is your force still selected prior to the mission?

"You have your Dropships, and your Dropships can at any time

bring in reinforcements to the battlefield," says Walfisz. "But, they also have limited cargo space. So at any one time, if you want to bring in the Dropship you need to decide what units you want to fit into the cargo bay, basically."

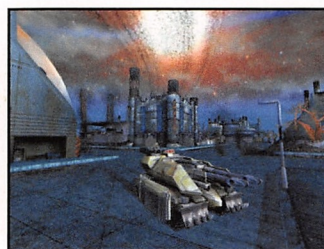
"So it makes for a very dynamic gameplay where you can sort of adapt to the situation at hand, but then it takes some time for the Dropship to arrive, then it has to fly back to the base, it can't drop units continuously. It takes time between each drop."

Dropships can also be upgraded over time, to carry more units and develop offensive capabilities. You also have off-map support weapons, such as artillery strikes and smoke grenade effects, which recharge over time.

Where the original Ground Control had a fully free-floating camera, this time Massive has added a 'locked' isometric view as well, allowing less experienced gamers to pick up and play. And that's a good thing, as Ground Control uses a punishing form of Fog of War, their "line of sight" system. Basically, your enemies are always invisible, unless one of your units can lay eyes on them directly.

A squad of infantry covering on a valley floor won't spot a tank convoy cruising past on a mountain ridge. It's a game of many nasty surprises.

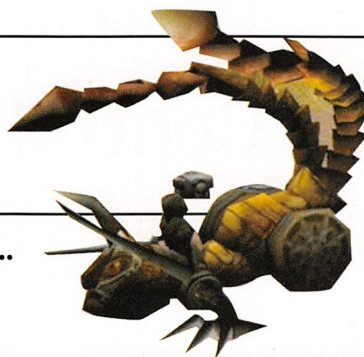
Ed Dawson



Developer: **Massive Entertainment** Publisher: **Vivendi** Distributor: **Vivendi** Due: **June**

Perimeter

Because the wind is high it blows my mind...



There are two kinds of people in this world. Those who watch Han Solo in the Millennium Falcon make the jump to Hyperspace and go "cool!" And those who go "hmn, I wonder if tiny distinct worlds could exist actually within the realm of hyperspace, and if those worlds would be shaped and formed by our own doubts and fears?"

Everyone who thinks this second way has a job at KD-Lab, because in a nutshell this is what Perimeter is about. Giant mechanical pyramids called Frames travel through hyperspace following a Chain of Worlds. At the bottom of the Chain, rumour has it there exists a world that is vast, lit by a warm sun and not apt to crack up, melt, explode or turn into strawberry meringue. In other words, the people of Perimeter are exiles, and are looking for Earth.

Things are complicated, however, by the way in which these hyperworlds respond to human thoughts. Imagine waking up in a country where every doubt or fear you ever had manifested itself into a hideous monster that wanted to eat your flesh. That's what life in the Chain is like.

Perimeter is basically an RTS that attempts to not be very much like any RTS that has come before it. Players still build bases and units, sure, but these are only hooks to get to into the game, vaguely familiar concepts to prepare you for the universe of strange you are about to encounter.

For a start, the key to establishing and at the same time defending a base is twofold. First, you have to smooth out the terrain using Brigadiers. Then, you need to build energy towers using Buildmasters. Thing is, Buildmasters and Brigadiers are actually the same unit - they need

to be converted inside the Frame. And you only get five.

Buildmasters can create fairly standard buildings such as robot labs, laser labs, rocket labs, basically a bunch of labs. However, these labs don't then let you build laser tanks or rocket launchers. No no. First you need to spit out hundreds - literally hundreds - of robotic officers and soldiers who can then be morphed into various other units.

In other words, you don't get individual units that are dedicated to a particular task. Instead you get four squads of soldiers and officers who can be morphed into different units based on how many soldiers and officers you have in each squad. Any questions?

Good. Then we'll go on. The eponymous Perimeter refers to a defensive shield that can be thrown up by your energy towers. If hideous swarms of Scourge (the nightmare creatures mentioned above) erupt over the hills headed for your base, flip on the Perimeter to turn them into so much nasty goo. Of course, using the Perimeter chews up heaps of energy. Fortunately, you can choose to only turn on bits of the perimeter, which takes more micromanagement but uses far less energy.

Scourge can dig under the Perimeter though, so it's up to your Brigadiers to keep the terrain around your base terraformed, filling in tunnels as soon as they are dug. And so it goes.

Personally, I dig this game very much. However, I've read a lot of high-concept science fiction and I like whacky premises. If you want tanks, night elves, gold and lumber, this won't be a game for you.

At the moment it's only 65% finished. I can only presume the other 35% will be equally as whack.

Anthony Fordham



Perimeter uses KD-Lab's bespoke voxel terrain engine that first made an appearance in the venerable Vangers. This makes for extreme detailed and deformable game maps, featuring crazy imagery from half-remembered visions and half-forgotten dreams. Giant Easter Island heads rub... uh... shoulders with dragons growing out the side of ziggurats. Perimeter doesn't have the sheer detail of C&C Generals, but it looks very different and that has to count for something in these clone-tastic times.

Developer: **KD-Lab** Publisher: **Codemasters** Distributor: **Atari** Due: **Q4 2004**

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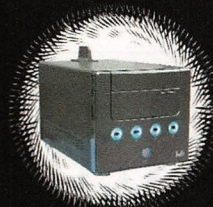


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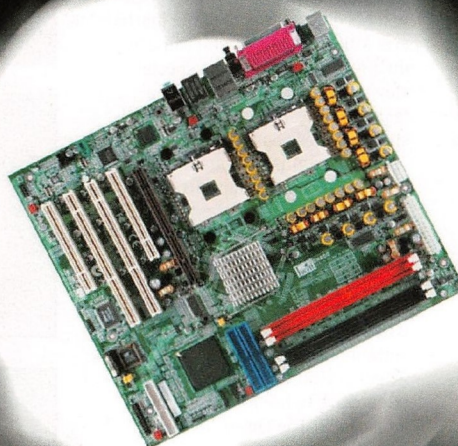
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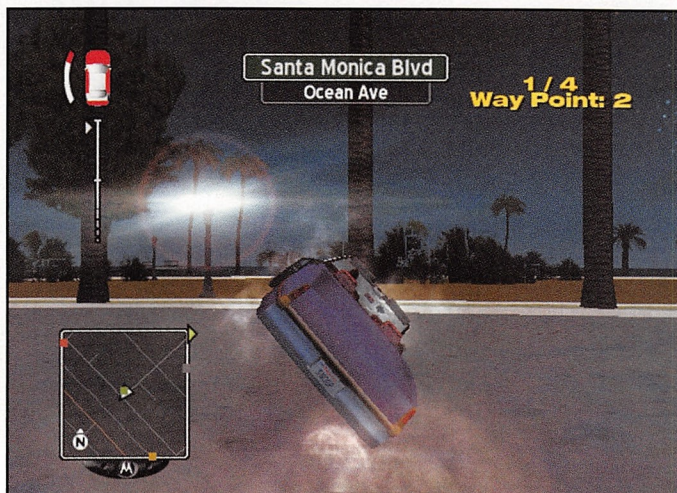
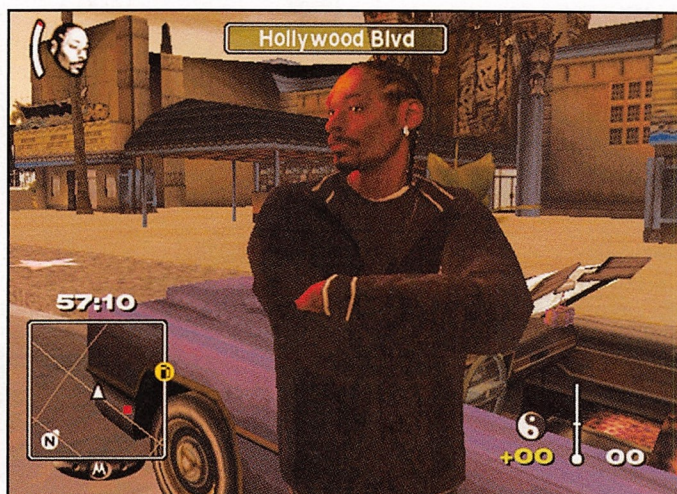
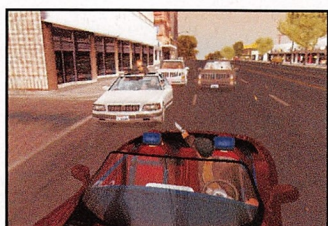
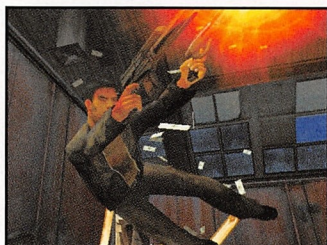
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True Crime: Streets of LA

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They say that if California up and seceded from the US, it would be the world's seventh richest nation. But would anyone necessarily want to live there?

True Crime reinforces everyone's opinion of LA - that the city is a massive, sprawling toilet beset by uncontrollable civil unrest, violent crime and all tied together with the world's most ridiculously oversized freeway system.

In other words, think GTA Vice City, but with real cars, real guns and with the player taking the part of supercop rather than superthug.

Verily, Nick Kang, a former LAPD cop with a chip on his shoulder and a spare clip in the lining of his silken underpants, has been booted from the force in circumstances similar to Vin Diesel's downfall in *A Man Apart*. Fortunately a reputation for extreme violence and a healthy disregard for the rights of the suspect makes Nick a perfect catch for the Elite Operations Division. The EOD is like the normal cops, except they get to drive sports cars and use even bigger guns.

Like the GTA series, True Crime features a fairly typical drugs/betrayal/crime/revenge story the player can follow if they so wish. However, it will also be possible to just drive around LA prosecuting random crimes thrown up by their car's police scanner.

Driving is to LA like oxygen is to the rest of us normal people, so naturally considerable time and effort has been spent accurately modelling the streets of LA. The developer claims anyone who actually knows the city will be able to drive around their favourite neighbourhoods and recognise many of the buildings.

Anyone who frequents their local computer games emporium and looks sadly at the masses and masses of new games that come out each month for PlayStation 2 will

know that True Crime has already done its time in console land and is only now coming to PC.

To this end, the game will have a distinct console flavour, although this may ultimately not be a bad thing.

GTA is great, sure, but the fighting elements of the game are somewhat simplistic. True Crime takes the GTA model but then adds combos and special moves, like any good fighting game. It's more *Soul Calibur II* than *Space Invaders*.

The player will be able to upgrade Nick Kang's hand-to-hand abilities at dojos dotted around the city, and also upgrade his weapons and weapons-proficiencies at gun shops and shooting ranges. Eventually, Nick will become an unstoppable martial-arts killing machine who can use dual pistols and access a special slow-mo bullet time, which is a feature *de rigueur* for all hardboiled shooters these days.

Activision is also making a big deal of the game's soundtrack, calling it the "one of the finest collections of modern rap". All the usual suspects will be included - Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube (*cough*), Eazy E and others. No word yet on whether Eminem is considered suitable material for a violent Los Angeles simulator or whether his talents are being reserved for *Popstars 3: The Quest for Global Dominance*.

Still, the opportunity to hit the mean streets of LA in an expensive car while wielding expensive guns sounds pretty tasty.

Anthony Fordham



True Crime has an 'impressive' cast list, although most of these names have already appeared in various computer games: Christopher Walken, Gary Oldman, Michael Madsen, Michelle Rodriguez and Ron Perlman. An unusual feature of the game is the ability to unlock a secret character - Snoop Dogg - who can then tool around down in a really bouncy car unleashing his own brand of whoop-ass on the ne'erdowells in the poorer quarters. Snoop is committed to stamping out unrest among the disenfranchised. You need a slum burnt to the ground? Tha Dogg is your man. Or dog. Or something.

Developer: Activision Publisher: Activision Distributor: Atari Due: Q3 2004



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Call of Duty: United Offensive

In which Infinity Ward's game of the year becomes a franchise...

United Offensive is the first expansion to the smash hit WWII shooter, Call of Duty, and is being created by Gray Matter, who most recently worked on Return to Castle Wolfenstein.

Adding a new flamethrower weapon and the ability to "cook off" grenades (hold them after pulling the pin), you'll also see some really nice revamped explosions and weather effects. And they ought to be, as this expansion will take you into some of the very coldest conflicts of the Second World War, so expect a lot of snow and miserable torrential downpours.

From the look of the screens, the new explosions will feature some amazing 3D particle effects and great sprays of animated dirt and debris launched into lofty parabolic arcs, as tends to happen when dozens of pounds of TNT go off at once.

The expansion continues the focus on the European theatre, with at least ten new levels and three campaigns covering famous battles such as the Battle of Kursk, the largest armoured battle of all time, between the Soviets and the Germans. Tank drivers will get a thorough work-out here, as well as in an all-new Tank Combat multiplayer mode. But there's more tank action to be had!

United Offensive will also derive inspiration from the Battle of the Bulge, a frosty conflagration in the Ardennes forest between the Germans and Allied forces. The Germans launched a huge attack against thinly spread US and British forces who were considered to be in a "quiet" position, with some inexperienced US forces deliberately assigned there for orientation. The Battle of the Bulge claimed some 800 tanks on both sides; the US took some of their heaviest casualties of the war (in a single engagement). The German army expended an enormous amount of men and equipment, only succeeding in creating a temporary "bulge" in the front line.

United Offensive will also feature the Invasion of Sicily, where Generals Patton and Montgomery staged a multi-directional US, British and Canadian assault in the mountainous countryside and densely packed cities and villages. Playing as the Russians, US and

The Battle of Kursk was supposed to be a "Blitzkrieg" form of surprise assault, whereby massed German armour punched through the front line. However, the Russians were aware of the attack. The biggest tank battle in history, the Battle of Kursk saw at least 400 tanks lost in a single day. So many tanks were reportedly burning on the field that aircraft overhead couldn't see targets for smoke. This was a battle of attrition in epic proportions, and the Germans could ill afford the massive loss to their war machine.



British forces respectively, you'll be taken through three allegedly epic campaigns, exploring these major battles and offensives.

The addition of the flamethrower suggests some great assaults against fortified positions – flamethrowers were excellent for clearing out pillboxes and concrete bunkers, think of the scene in Saving Private Ryan. There were many of these "hardened" defences present in these epic historical battles as both sides often had months to dig in and prepare, considering the positions to be of utmost military significance. In fact, the sheer massive scale of these conflicts suggests that the game's capabilities will really be stretched to the limit, as in the Stalingrad sequence from the original – rendering massive numbers of troops and objects on screen.

Infinity Ward, the original developer will also contribute some unique content for the game, but as to exactly what, they're not saying. Call of Duty: United Offensive is slated for release in the Australian spring, 2004.

Ed Dawson



Developer: **Gray Matter** Publisher: **Activision** Distributor: **Activision** Due: **October**

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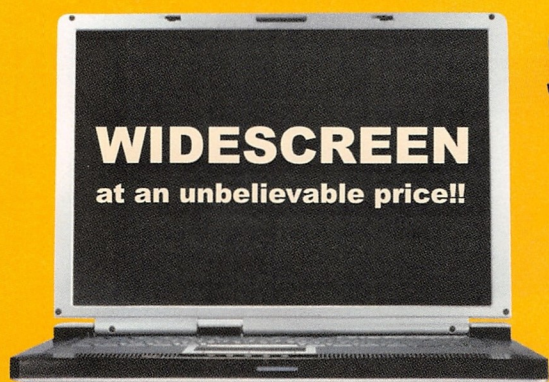
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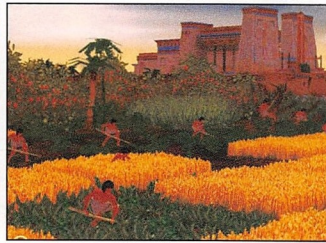
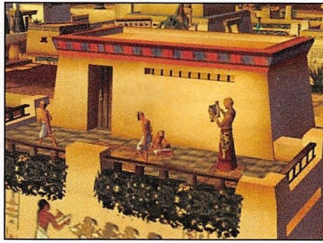
Mini Previews

Children of the Nile

Developer: Tilted Mill

Due: November

In the tradition of Pharaoh, this new city building sim from ex-Impressions developers promises to focus on people instead of gold, wood or ore as your chief resource.

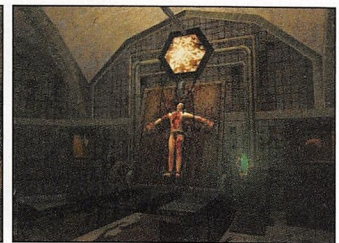


Call of Cthulhu

Developer: Headfirst

Due: October

A first-person tale of horror based on Lovecraft's macabre mythology, this has been in development hell for a number of years. However, recent signs suggest things are back on track.

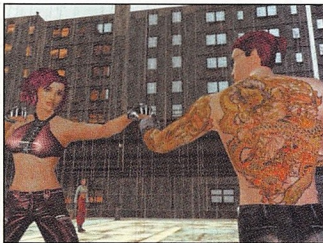


The Matrix Online

Developer: Monolith

Due: TBC

After being ditched by original publisher Ubisoft, Monolith rushed out some new screenshots to assure everyone that their game was safe and sound. So, here they are.

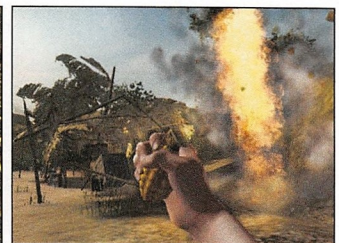
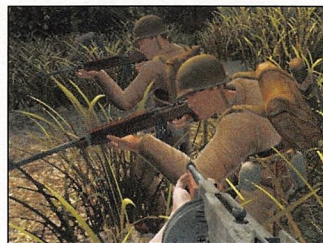


Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault

Developer: EA

Due: November

A recent insider report on seeing this in action suggests the teacher has learned from the pupil - that is, the Pacific Assault team has been playing a hell of a lot of Call of Duty. Which can only be good.



Rollercoaster Tycoon 3

Developer: Frontier

Due: November

Here are a couple of new images of the third in this venerable carnival sim series. Obviously the 3D engine lends it all a Theme Park World feel, but hopefully with richer gameplay.



Silent Hunter 3

Developer: Ubisoft

Due: October

Boasting "exact replica WWII technology", Ubisoft is pledging more than just a mere naval simulation. Oh no, this is a U-boat captain simulator. We think this means some sort of career mode.

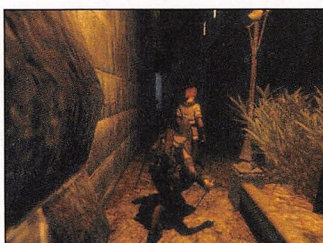


Thief: Deadly Shadows

Developer: Ion Storm

Due: June

More drop-dead gorgeous Thief 3 screens, one of which shows Garrett's new-found ability to scale sheer walls thanks to his discovery of special climbing gloves. You have to admit it looks cool.

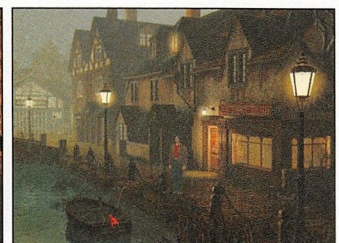
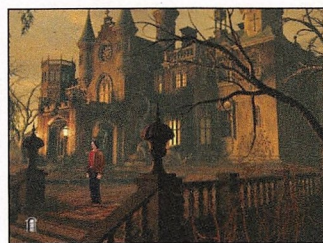


Black Mirror

Developer: Future Games

Due: TBC

Already available overseas in Europe and the US, this point-and-click adventure from Czech studio Future Games has garnered some considerable acclaim. We've ordered a copy and will have a review soon.



Harry Potter & the Prisoner of Azkaban

Developer: EA

Due: May

It's Harry's third year at Hogwarts, but this time the focus switches to his pals Hermione and Ron thanks to an option to switch between all three characters. Strange it's not coming out at Christmas though.

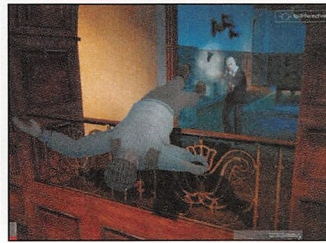
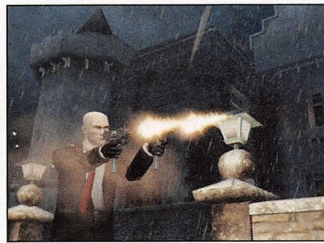


Hitman: Contracts

Developer: IO Interactive

Due: June

Another issue, another batch of Hitman screenshots thanks to our efficient friends at Eidos. Will it deliver on its promise to explore the psychology of the assassin? Or is it another stealth puzzle game?

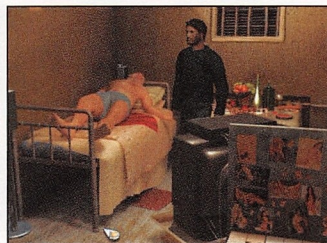


Midnight Nowhere

Developer: Saturn+

Due: TBC

A point-and-click adventure dressed up in fetish gear, Midnight Nowhere is a self-proclaimed "controversial" game from Russia. With love. Little chance of a local release then.

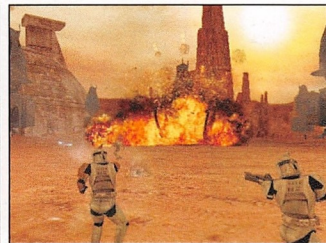
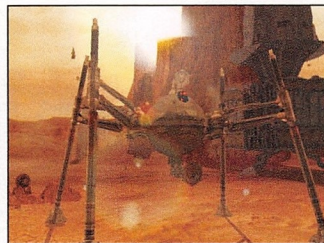


Star Wars: Battlefront

Developer: Pandemic

Due: October

More than Battlefield with a Star Wars skin, Pandemic online shooter has a whiff of Planetside about it. The Conquest mode sees you fighting for control of the entire galaxy, planet-by-planet.



Star Wars: Republic Commando

Developer: LucasArts

Due: October

New pics to follow last month's unveiling. LucasArts is promising players a sneak peek at a location and a character from Episode III. Wow. We'd buy a \$100 game just for that, wouldn't you?

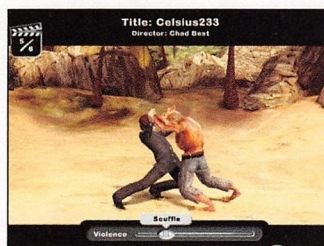


The Movies

Developer: Lionhead

Due: September

Just like Singles, Lionhead has adopted an interface eerily similar to that of The Sims. It makes sense though, since it's a layout and functionality everyone is (overly) familiar with.

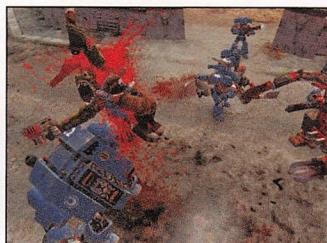


Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War

Developer: Relic

Due: September

Homeworld and Impossible Creatures developer Relic brings its RTS expertise to the world of Warhammer 40K. Dawn of War is yet another action-oriented RTS that glosses over resource gathering.

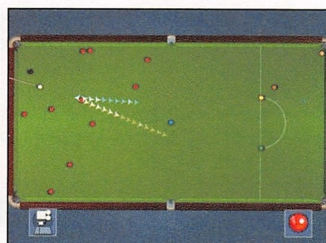


World Championship Snooker

Developer: Codemasters

Due: August

It's been too long between snooker sims, but Codies have spent the last six months wisely bringing online play to its baize and balls series. All animations have been "motion-captured" too. Sweet.



10

David Wildgoose arrived at Valve's office expecting to be astounded by a completely new experience. After playing Half-Life 2, he soon realised it is of course only a game. It's just that, well... Half-Life 2 is not like any other game...

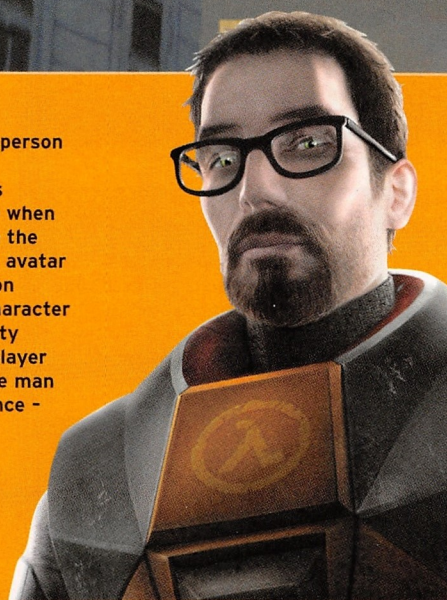
Reasons Why Half-Life 2 Is Gonna Rock Your World

1

NO INTRO

Half-Life is all about immersion. When Valve's Doug Lombardi launches the game on the PC in front of me, it loads immediately to the title screen. The words "Half-Life 2" and its menu options settle gently in front of a bleak backdrop depicting a chilly mountain range. He then loads the game's first area or level; there's no opening cinematic, no introductory cut-scene, just a swift load and I'm immediately immersed in the game. This is important.

Valve understands the first-person experience like few other developers. They realise this experience is most effective when the player is able to become the character, when the player's avatar is totally transparent. Gordon Freeman is such a strong character because he has no personality traits outside of those the player attributes to him. He's a free man in the sense that his existence - your existence - is defined solely through the player's choice of actions. You never see Gordon throughout the entire game so the illusion that you are Gordon is never broken.





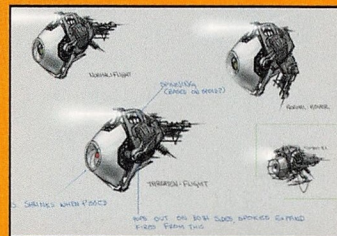
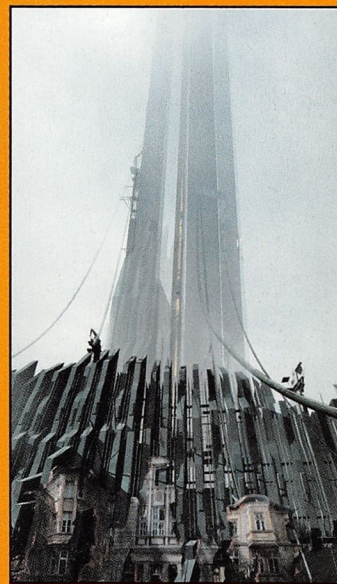
2

THE FIRST TIME

Ah yes, the original Half-Life. It was rather good, wasn't it. (Note the absence of a question mark there.) Valve's achievement with its very first game cannot be overstated. Polished to perfection, Half-Life's single-player game mixed memorable set-pieces, varied yet coherent environments (except maybe Xen), and plausible, challenging AI with just enough narrative to keep you intrigued but not enough to slow the pace. The technical achievements - the streaming loading, reinventing the Quake 2 engine - were secondary concerns; in one game Valve nailed the gameplay template we would see imitated for years to come.

Imitated, not emulated. Plenty have tried, but surprisingly few games have come close to matching let alone surpassing Half-Life. When recently revisiting Gordon's travails at the Black Mesa complex, it was almost as if the last five years hadn't happened.

When Half-Life 2 begins, Gordon cannot remember anything since the end of the first game. And trust me, chances are you won't either...





3

BLOODY HELL

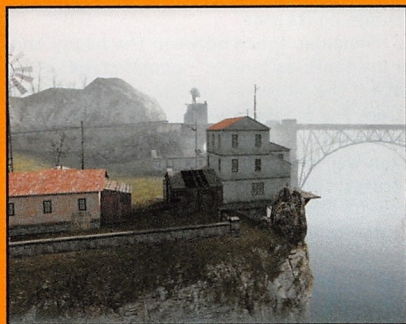
Dominating the first scene is an immense electronic screen hanging on the far wall of a large room like some sort of religio-digital icon. On it, an elegantly groomed middle-aged man intones an important public announcement in a warm, calm voice, as if reciting a hypnotist's refrain rather than, for example, imparting crucial game information.

Below his omnipresent gaze, a handful of City 17's citizens shuffle about their business in what resembles a bank or government building. As you approach the queue, someone looks up, meets your eye and offers a greeting. Such an acknowledgment feels perfectly natural. These people seem uncannily real.

You step out into a street scene unprecedented in gaming. The scale is correct; the architectural design is stylised yet consistent; everything seems in its place. You fail to notice the usual uniform geometry or obvious templated building blocks you would expect from virtual construction; there are none of the typical telltale signs betraying the fact this is a mere game world.

In the distance, above the security blockade manned by slightly menacing, masked guards, beyond the rooftops of the buildings opposite, an oddly mechanical creature lopes along the next street atop three stilt-like legs. You recognise it from last year's E3 footage. It's a Strider. A chill strikes the back of your neck...

Much like the tram ride in the original, Valve again wants to ease you into their world in a non-threatening manner. It's an opportunity to soak up the atmosphere and find your bearings before the obligatory shit hits the fan...



4

AND HIT IT DOES!

In addition to an exercise in sublime virtual world immersion, Valve also knows it is - first and foremost - making a first-person shooter. So Lombardi instructs me to quit out of the opening area and leap ahead to a no-holds-barred combat situation.

I soon find myself in a graveyard that slices through a valley, contorting itself around the high ridges that act as an organic edge-of-the-map barrier. It is night, as it always is when surrounded by the dead and, er... the undead. A lab-coated companion urges me to follow him, so I do. He has a shotgun, after all.

Inevitably we're swiftly ambushed as vaguely humanoid shapes dash along the top of the ridge while before us a troop of recently deceased creatures stagger closer. I fumble the mousewheel for the first available weapon and luck out with some sort of assault rifle. Within seconds we've been outflanked and forced to fight on two fronts: headcrab zombies straight ahead; their more agile friends on our six.

Following my companion's lead, I switch to the shotgun and aim for the head, downing each enemy with a single blast. It's brutal and visceral and I'm loving every second of it. We make it as far as a crypt, looking suspiciously like it doubles - quite literally - as a dead end, before Lombardi pulls the plug and suggests I restart the map to try things a little differently...

6

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Successful implementation of a reliable physics simulation offers the designer and the player two obvious benefits: the game world becomes both consistent and intuitive. Valve has spent the past few years working in collaboration with Havok in an effort to extract every conceivable equation from the company's eponymous physics engine.

You will have seen games boasting so-called advanced physics engines before, of course. Typically all this amounts to in practice is rolling barrels, bouncing balls or dead bodies collapsing semi-convincingly. In Half-Life 2, if you try to interact with a physical object then chances are it will actually work or respond as expected because each object has sensible, near real world physical properties. And, yeah, it also has barrels.

Back at the dead end near the crypt, beyond the trail of newly decapitated zombies, my lab-coated companion and I have our backs to the wall, hemmed in by the seemingly multiplying, advancing, undead throng. Then I spy the barrels. They're just sitting there, innocuous, familiar symbols on their sides indicating hazardous material. I kick one over and it rolls down the stairs towards the zombies. I shoot it and it creates the expected distraction.

Out comes the Manipulator and soon the barrels start flying... with the headcrab zombies tracing arcs through the air in their wake...

5

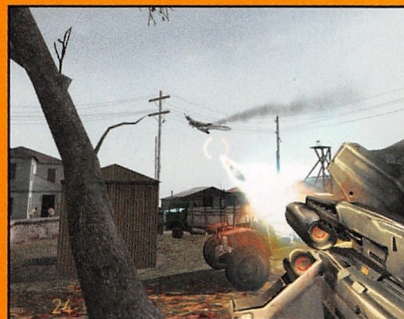
THE MANIPULATOR

You probably know it better as "the gravity gun", as it was affectionately referred to after attracting (no pun intended) the lion's share of attention from last year's debut showing at E3. In that famous E3 footage, the Manipulator, to use its correct name, is the hardware Gordon uses to "pick up" a radiator for use as a shield or a crate to hurl at an onrushing enemy. There are two modes: attract and repel. The former allows you to pull objects towards you, even levitating them if they are light enough; the latter lets you push objects away or shoot light objects once already attracted.

How this weapon alters and enhances the conventional FPS gameplay can easily be imagined, but perhaps not fully appreciated until you experience it first-hand. In most instances you'll approach each situation with your regular firearms in hand - the trusty shotgun or assault rifle, both effective tools for eliminating resistance.

Yet the more resourceful amongst you will note any opportunity to switch to the Manipulator and use it to exploit the environment to your advantage. Instead of pumping countless shells into those headcrab zombies, try picking up those stone tablets littering the graveyard and launching them at the persistent foe - line them up and you'll cleave several heads with one shot. I do precisely that, thus wisely conserving valuable ammo for the dangers ahead.

The Manipulator offers a new way of interacting with the world, but it wouldn't be the same without a robust physics engine...



7

DONUTS BY THE DOCKS

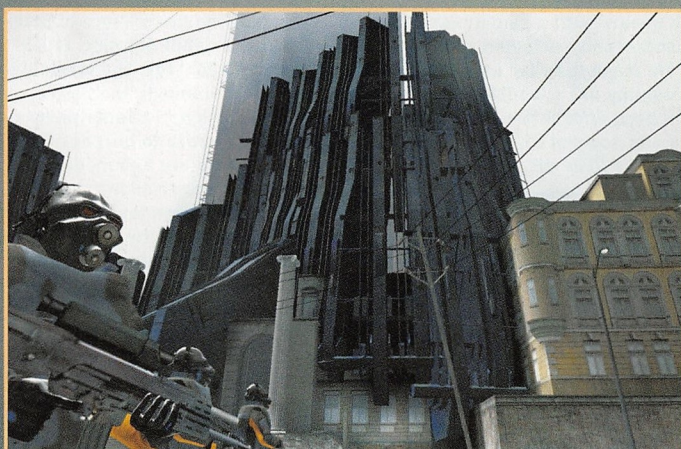
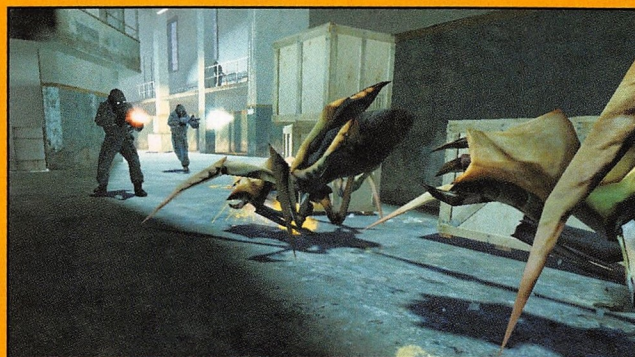
Headcrabs thus headed off at the pass, Lombardi again instructs me to quit and once again jump ahead (back? I have no idea where these areas fit into the grand scheme) to a new location.

I find myself in a harbour. City 17 must be enduring a drought or else the low tide is unnaturally severe because there is a considerable dry bank surrounding the water below the docks. It's wide enough to drive a dune buggy around. Conveniently there is a dune buggy in front of me. I dutifully take it for a spin.

Later, once I've finished tearing donuts in the mud, I find myself on the docks. A raised bridge blocks the way ahead, while a crane sits nearby. Commandeering the crane, I swing its magnetic arm towards and into the bridge, the force of which knocks it down and into place. The commotion has alerted the guards stationed in a nearby warehouse, who proceed to open fire on me while taking cover behind various shipping crates.

At this point I have several options: leave the crane, cross the bridge on foot and tackle the guards; use the crane to hoist my buggy onto the bridge, leave the crane, jump in the buggy and tackle the guards; stay with the crane, pick up a shipping crate, swing it wildly back and forth, terrorising the guards and killing them with a big hunk of metal. I choose the latter.

While doing so, I reflect on how this scenario is physics as gameplay rather than physics as cosmetics... *splat!*... then return to swatting guards with childlike glee.



8

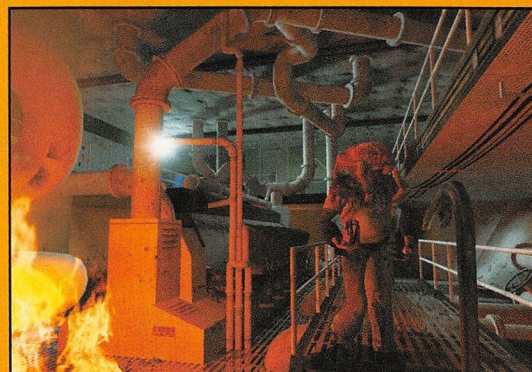
METAL STORM

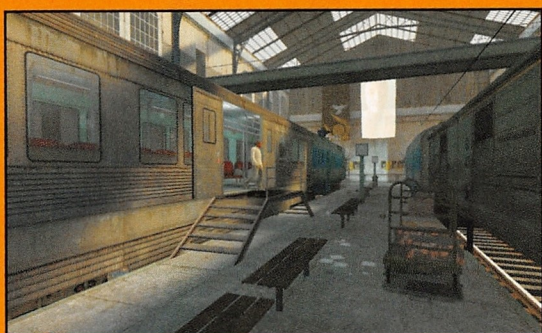
So I leave the crane behind with, it must be said, a pang of regret. I reverse my dune buggy into the warehouse, leap out to hit a nearby switch, and screech through the side door I just opened.

Up a ramp and round a corner I run into another clutch of masked guards who are once again most determined to prevent me from snooping around their warehouses. In my haste to run them over I fail to notice another ramp, miss-time my approach and succeed only in flipping the buggy on its side.

Trapped in a triangular space between the buggy and two walls, I grit my teeth as bullets - *chink! chink! ch-ch-chink!* - ricochet off the sideways vehicle-cum-shield now protecting me from the masked death squad. Through the bars of the buggy's rollcage, I can see several of the guards have taken well-protected positions amongst more shipping crates. I fire a round before ducking back behind my makeshift barricade, but it's futile. There's too many of 'em, I think to myself, as Lombardi chuckles in the background. Damn him.

Then the gunfire and the ricocheting bullets and the *chink! chink! ch-ch-chink!* dies down. Suddenly it's quiet save for a couple of sets of footsteps. I switch to the manipulator, point it at the buggy and hit repel. The four-wheeled metal shield turns battering ram as my weapon flings it half-way across the warehouse floor - its sickening impact with two of the guards proves fatal...





9

ROLLERBALL

Away from the confines of the warehouses and the docks, my buggy is at last able to stretch its axles on the open road that snakes into the distance along a cliff face heading away from the harbour.

At one point a flying vehicle remarkably similar to the one from the E3 video's climax appears over the mountainous horizon. Recalling the manner in which it defeated Gordon in that same video, I press harder on the accelerator and hope to outrun it. A tunnel through the hillside comes to my aid and I can soon relax.

Except of course you can never totally relax in Half-Life 2. Weaving between skeletal car remains, I notice four spiked, spherical shapes emerge from the dirt road and roll towards me as if attracted by some strange... oh crap, they're now stuck like magnets to my front grill, their EMP attacks causing the buggy to spring into the air and making it very difficult to steer.

The cautious player could stop the car, shoot the spheres at just the right angle to send them flying off and over the cliff, then jump back in and continue. The cavalier player (ie. yours truly) would keep driving, run the risk of an EMP blast send you flying off and over the cliff, then jump out near the security station at the upcoming bridge and shoot the spheres at just the right angle to send them flying into the gaggle of guards lurking nearby.

Both are valid approaches, with their own risk versus reward equation, and potentially successful strategies. And both represent what Half-Life 2 is all about: varied combat situations in which you devise and implement tactics and solutions on the fly, depending on your personal play style, skill or whim.

10

THE TRUTH

That's Half-Life 2.
It's not like other games.





The Next 100 Gaming 101 and Beyond

Telling you what happened in the first 100 was a tad easy for Timothy C. Best's inflated ego to handle, so we decided to make him tell us what will be in the next 100... that'll learn him.

By 2011 I'll be married to an artist/super model, working on my third novel and be negotiating casting for the movie based on my best-selling graphic novel series. Of course I'll also be consulting with both Pixar and Lionhead and they'll be lost without me.

Strangely, I can't actually back up these claims with Predict-o-matic statistics because whenever I enter this career path it just makes a wheezing sound – which everyone in the office seems to think is machine laughter – but I know better.

With the Predict-o-matic obviously on the fritz, it looks like we'll have to rely on other means to see what lies ahead. Luckily, the future can't help dropping hints about where it's headed like some annoying preppy.

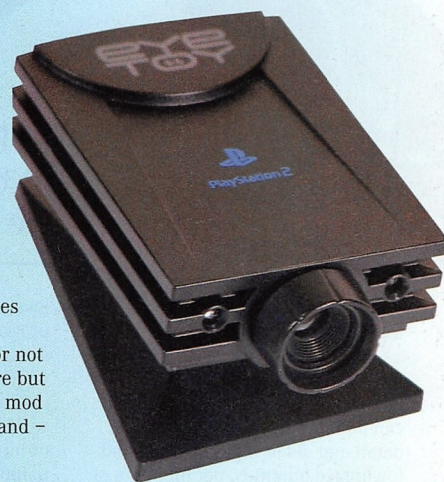
Some hints are more blatant than others and at the moment we have a couple jumping up and down and

waving placards: say hello to Doom III and Half-Life 2.

Both games and their engines represent the heavy-weights of action games, with id known for not only kick-starting the FPS genre but also for leading the way for the mod scene, kick-arse network code and – especially where Doom III is concerned – amazing graphics; while the original Half-Life shocked us with its story, suspense, artificial intelligence and then by creating a supercharged mod scene.

Both engines describe the future of gaming, for the next couple of years at least, and they both hoick up the bar for virtual worlds to come.

Looking beyond these two titanic shooters and we have to follow the clues dropped by the movie industry, check out Sony's drawing boards, sniff around promising new technology, as well as analyse the changing way people are reacting to their digitised world. By following



the signs we can swing away into the precocious pages of one hundred PCPPs to come.

Trick Lighting

First things, first, the obsession with graphics is far from over. Graphics are too sexy and too easy to sell. I don't know how many comments under newly released game stuff I've read which state that a game looks like poo and which people won't download because it doesn't look like Half-Life 2. As we all know, pretty sells.



101 and Beyond



but its transgressions become apparent when you see how things are meant to be.

It's the Little Things

Continuing along this theme of trading brute force for finesse we see facial animation coming into focus.

Most of what we communicate comes in our faces and body language, so capturing emotion and expression will be one of the major advances that we'll see in the coming years, not because it's something we see in every frame, but because it's something we identify with on a subconscious level.

By modelling the muscles in its character's faces, Valve's Source Engine can generate expressions realistic for each face in the game. What's even more impressive is that you can now capture something as complicated as faces with something as simple as a decent web-cam.

Add other advances in animation like the Endorphin Software and worlds will start to leap off the screen.

Endorphin is the first generation of truly evolutionary animation

Capturing emotion will be one of the next major advances because it's something we identify with on a subconscious level

That's not going to change but the way we draw pretty is.

The preoccupation with polygon numbers will fade. When Valve talks about what its Source engine can do it talks in terms of level of detail and about high, medium and low image qualities, not numbers of sides on a mesh.

Something like normal mapping makes numbers like that mean less and less. It is the next step up from bump mapping and allows shader information from high-poly models to be applied to lower-poly meshes. Keeping all of the high-poly shading fills out surfaces with complex shadows and detailed shading making them appear much more complex than they actually are.

On the lighting front, the big graphics advance for Doom III is the fully integrated approach to those

lovely little photons. id's programming guru, John Carmack describes the Hanna Barbara effect which is basically the way that in old cartoons you could tell what would move because it would look different to the rest of the carefully painted background.

Well, with Doom III he's looking to do away with the Hanna Barbara effect in games by having everything lit correctly, without the usual cheating. You'll set light sources and effects and they will illuminate everything in the engine, creating subtle shadows, gently mixed colour and, in general, a much more realistic and seamless world. Most 3D games have shadows painted onto areas and separate lighting work-arounds for character models that need to roam freely. Cheating can fool the eye,

which combines biology, virtual muscle and neural nets to create animations that are grown to order on the fly. It lets animators set things like how joints move, the strength of muscles and gravity and then has the computer running a whole host of trial-and-error tests to work out ways such a creature (or character) could move, with the animators directing the computer down the coolest looking paths.

New animation techniques like these mean endless variations of looks and body language can be grown uniquely for every character and creature we see -without needing to hand draw each movement or hire an endless stream of actors.

Within the next few years we'll start seeing games, especially massively multiplayer games, that

let players use their own expressions to breathe life into their toons.

Of course, not everyone will go for something like that, because, frankly, we'd rather play characters that are cooler than us, but I guess that's why you'd want to be able to turn it on and off.

On a similar note, Sony is releasing software for the EyeToy that lets users map their own face into the console for use on their avatars, and shops in Tokyo have virtual fitting rooms which scan customers, create them in 3D and show them how clothes will look on them. As you can imagine, custom avatars are going to go through the roof and you'll see the technology used for games and movie characters come closer and closer together.

Rounding out the new visual experience will be in-game physics that let you see and hear empty cans roll past you, and clothes ripple and pull in the wind.

By the next generation of game engines we'll see graphics like a Pixar or Square film (Finding Nemo or Flight of the Osiris), and by the generation after we'll be seeing graphics like the computer work in Return of the King and Matrix Revolution ... and you can be pretty sure it won't be more polygons that get us there, it'll be the little touches that make all of the difference.

Displays of Affection

If you look at the past few years it's really only been videocards that have really leapt forward above and beyond your normal Moore's law kind of advancement. In the next few years it'll be the monitor's time to shine. Sure we've got LCD screens now, and CRT monitors with flatter screens, but things will get really interesting with OLED displays.

Organic Light Emitting Diodes use organic chemicals that emit certain coloured light when electricity is run through them. They have great image quality, awesome colour contrast, low power consumption, wide viewing angle, hold up at large sizes, are cheaper to make than LCDs and can be sprayed onto flexible materials to create a





Close But No Cigar

There are a bunch of tempting techs that we could have in the next few years but which will probably stall like the VirtualBoy.

Gaming with goggles. Great except most people need to keep a foot in our world, they need to hear parents coming up the stairs, kids falling down them and bosses about to climb on their backs. Too much running into walls as well.

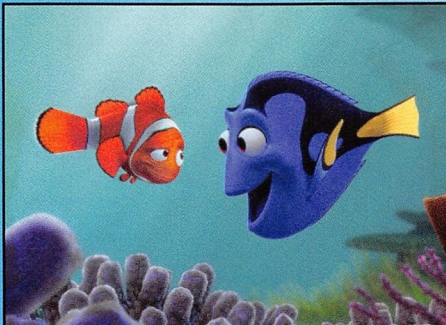
True jump-out-the-screen 3D displays. Needs mass market to invest in new screens to work as well as 3D controllers. Would take a mega game to embrace the tech.

Interactive TV. TV watchers, generally just want to watch, plus imagine how much crappier Romeo and Juliet gets if you choose the happy ending.

Voice in MMORPG. Not until on-the-fly voice modulation lets Jeff the video store clerk actually sound like Lady Hawkmoon with a British accent.

The Next 100 Gaming

101 *and Beyond*



The Chick Flick

In the next 100 issues we're going to see a much greater variety of games as makers try to capture the mass appeal of *The Sims* and tap into the surveys that find that middle-aged women are the most common form of online gamer (go card, puzzle and trivia games, go). I bet you can name dozens of chick flicks and even chick music but naming chick games isn't as easy. You just wait. As game AIs get better they'll be more able to plum the emotional and social aspects of story-telling and gameplay and we'll see whole new game markets open up.

Give it a few years for the chemistry to get its act together and then get ready to kiss your crystals and cathodes goodbye.

Pixel-Perfect Control

Over the past couple of years we've seen screen resolutions creep from 800x600 to 1024x768 or even 1280x1024. Even something that simple has allowed us to cram more icons onto our desktops and shown how much of a difference precise control and pristine pixel placement can make. This is just an example that with size and clarity come control.

Beyond the possibilities with touch screens we'll also see the rise of cameras as an input device. These babies will become a must have. Voice recognition becomes much, much more accurate when coupled with the lip-reading confirmation that a camera can provide.

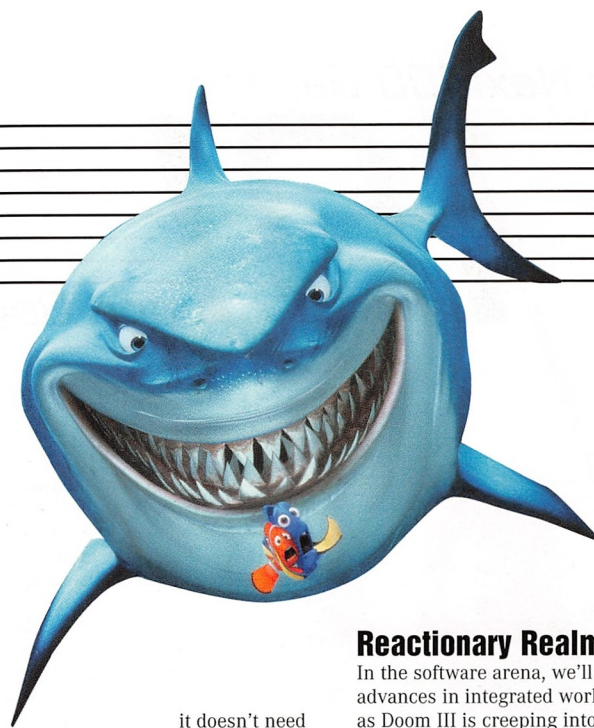
Furthermore, cameras can see when you are watching the screen or if your focus is pulled away to a telephone or a toilet break and it can pause or prioritise functions based on it.

When it comes to reading motion, Sony's PS2 EyeToy was so popular that it's been added to Sega's arcades across Japan, similar devices are set to become standard on future generations of PlayStation and it's being featured in EA's next Harry Potter game.

If you want to venture beyond webcams, we have the motion-sensing GameTrack. It sits on the ground and has two points of reference which can monitor movement in a 3m cube to within a millimetre and to speeds of up to 1600kmph... if you believe the hype. This baby isn't just being designed for tracking punches, but also golf clubs and even swords.

In the future we'll see all of this coming together and we'll be able to play in 3D almost as easily as reaching out and touching – like we'd do playing with a model set.

Of course, all of this will take time. The mouse and keyboard, which hasn't changed much in decades is just too common and versatile to be ousted without a fight, but that's exactly why motion and voice recognition will be the combo to do it. It's natural for us, it can be used for any application and



it doesn't need specific hardware beyond a couple of webcams and maybe something to read distance.

Come Together

These big screens and motion readers are fine at home but you might start KO-ing people on the train – that's where convergence will come in. Phones and PDAs are becoming interchangeable and they are both starting to look like Game Boys. Since they already have phones built in it makes perfect sense that their online abilities should go further than getting emails.

MicroForte is already at work making middleware software for its Big World MMORPG software and Microsoft .net initiative is all about

Reactionary Realms

In the software arena, we'll see big advances in integrated worlds. Just as *Doom III* is creeping into a world of seamless light and shadow, *Half-Life 2* is edging towards a seamless world of physics.

Instead of just having rag-doll physics for dying bodies tumbling down stairs, it has this level of physics for pretty much every object, meaning that you can shoot down light poles and have them crush opponents. No scripting, just physics and clever problem solving. This opens huge areas of new gameplay as everything becomes a possible weapon.

This of course is only possible because of complementary advances in AI that allow the game to work out what to do when players block a door with a table, or create a bridge with a fallen pylon. Enemies now have to have the brain power to

The game will notice if you keep stealing lollipops from kids and mothers will get angrier, bounties put on your head...

getting systems to talk to one another. Just as we see scaleable PC engines we will start to see middleware that scales a game down to mobile size.

For something like an RPG or strategy game, if relative positions are right then it doesn't really matter if one player sees it all in 3D and another sees it as sprites moving around a chequered grid from top-down perspective.

Even if this proves distracting you'll certainly be tuning up your ride, machining weapons, shopping for gear and organising your raid teams on the way home in the not so distant. Gaming on the go will take on a life all of its own – although we'll have to wait for those tiny, high-Gig storage devices to do it properly.

realise that they can take damage from falling fan blades, they have to realise that they can throw barrels at you if you destroy a bridge or bash down doors when their way is barred.

While the advances in individual actor AI will be impressive, the big AI push we'll see will be on a more worldly scale.

You'll be able to ask characters where they last saw Pete Right-Hand-Man of Doom, the game will notice if you keep stealing lollipops from kids and mothers will get angrier, bounties will be put on your head and other characters will be sent out after you, and it'll happen in a much more interesting way than just direct relationships – it'll all be interconnected like the whole game is a character. You'll see the

tough screen that can be rolled up like a poster.

What's more they've already been used by the likes of Universal Display Corp., Cambridge Display, Sony and Kodak in mobiles, car audio equipment and digital cameras. So why don't we have them?

It's quite simple: the things run out of puff. If you had them on all of the time they would only last a couple of years and you'd see your blue colours get weird long before that.

101 and Beyond



yet it has flourished on the back of titles like Counter-Strike, Day of Defeat and through supporting its aging engine.

For id to take back the modding scene and reap the rewards to be had it will have to make an engine that is easy to update, versatile and stable. In other words it will have to strive for that re-usability that Carmack is talking about.

Admittedly, most top-notch new engines

names – are starting to take notice. In the past we were talking mainly cult heroes or sci-fi buffs, but now everyone from big Arnie to Dame Judy Dench is appearing in games (Judy Dench is playing M in the latest Bond game ... the one without a movie attached to it).

We'll see more full body scans and motion capture, more consulting, more star involvement and more big names being the real-world face for their virtual creations.

Even if the developers could just mock them up, actual actors give the games a face, and a real presence that marketers can latch onto. You'll see game marketing take on whole new dimensions in the coming years. You'll be able to access racing games in car showrooms (Mitsubishi already does this in Japan), and you'll see product placement get much more interesting, above and beyond people clambering to get their cars into GTA4 and Red Bull dropping cans as power-ups into Worms 3D.

When game engines become like movie sets we'll see games more about art and design than technical prowess

ripple effect more and more as developers strive to give players more immersive and free-form worlds to explore.

Reusable Revolution

While all of the graphics, AI and physics stuff sounds sexy, the biggest change in the biz will come in the way that games are actually made. In 2003, 3D programming guru John Carmack said that it's possible that the coming generation of game engine would be stable enough to use in the same way cameras and movie equipment is used: over and over again, without re-inventing the lens for each project.

You can see the truth in his words when you look at something like the Half-Life engine. It's based on Quake 1, from 1996, was first released in 1998 and it's been continually patched, fixed and updated so that we are still seeing kick-arse mods being made using it, ranging from Matrix-style games, to hand-to-hand beat 'em ups, RPGs and even real-time strategy games.

Just think about it, Valve has had six years between releasing a game,

put the patched Half-Life 1 engine to shame, but even this could be remedied with scaling technology like using level of detail technology across the board, giving engines room to grow into the increasing computing power available to them.

When game engines become like 80mm film, Technicolor, Dolby Sound and Panovision we'll see games become much more about art and design than technical prowess. We'll also see much shorter development cycles and easier to secure funding as games become a little less hit and miss (imagine trying to get a movie made if you told your investors that you were inventing your cameras, boom and editing equipment as you went).

Silicon Tinsel Town

As the game industry matures we'll also see it take on more of Hollywood. More Hollywood talent, more Hollywood tantrums, more Hollywood product placement and more movie studio funding structures, outsourcing and agents.

It's no secret that games are becoming more and more mainstream. Hollywood actors– big

So Many Issues So Little Time

All of this might seem a tad conservative, but as I've said if you look back on how gaming changes you'll see that it likes to move in massive trends as something particularly sexy comes along and eclipses all the other cool stuff.

So my pick for the next big trends are the huge OLED monitors (they plug into everything else so neatly) and the next generation of input devices that moves us beyond the decades-old mouse and keyboard and into the 3D revolution.

Beyond that, the process will be the big mover and shaker. Now that the industry is showing its staying power and mass appeal it'll start streamlining the way it works, kind of the same way that EA has a kick arse process in place to make sure it turns out hits.

So, what will we be reading about in 2011? We'll have huge wall screens with mini-windows for TV, email and ordering snacks. We'll grab 3D icons with hand gestures and move avatars with subtle body movements. We'll shoot bad guys with outstretched figures and virtual dating will be a whole lot more fun. PCPP will be on neat electronic



paper and you'll be able to switch between it and one of my best selling novels with a sceptical look.

While all of this will change, a lot will change a lot will stay the same. In a nice display of cosmic symmetry, just as we had Duke Nukem on the cover of our first issue, he'll appear again for our bicentennial issue when Duke Nukem Forever finally arrives.

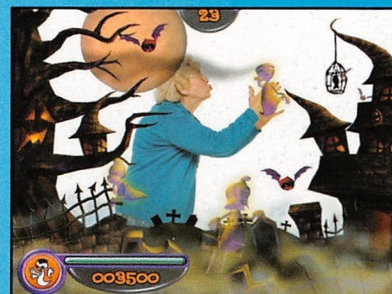
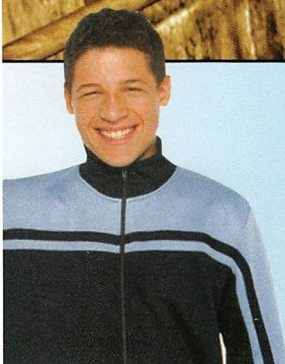


Sony This, Sony That

I make a lot of mentions of Sony's game tech, and that's just because it's in a little world of its own. If Sony wants to try something like the Eyetoy then it just whips it up, makes sure it works on one console and then gets it sold front and centre with the PS2.

The Sony games division doesn't have to worry about compatibility, signing up game companies to support their do-dads, fight for shelf space, or scrap for development dollars ... all things that get in the way of PC games hardware development.

While PCs will always have the grunt, consoles will always get the toys first - I think it has to do with Sony having endless anime-watching, blue-haired freaks on their payroll.





BEST IN PEACE

In 100 issues, we've seen hundreds of game ideas and concepts progress from conception to release, growing up into fully-fledged commercial games before our very eyes.

Ed Dawson pays tribute to some of those that didn't make it...

Making computer games is a high risk business. Sure, playing them is great fun, but the process of funding, finishing and pushing games onto retail shelves is often a seat-of-the-pants journey, even for some of the best in the business. Combine this with the fact that many A-grade games are taking big gambles with untried technology, and it's not hard to see how even gold-plated game concepts can find themselves frozen in time, never to be completed. Would they have been great?

Game production can be such an unpredictable process that sometimes even heavily publicised titles can slip between the cracks, even after a community of fans has formed, anticipating the release. It's these games that we'll focus on - titles throughout PowerPlay's history that had been bandied about by publishers, even sometimes written up in previews by our crew of seasoned journalists. Games we were sincerely looking forward to - only to be surprised and saddened by the news of their sudden death, or even worse - evidence of their slow, painful slide into oblivion. The technology crash hit many good game companies hard - resulting in quite a few of the casualties on this list.

Cue weeping violins...

Prey

THE PLAN

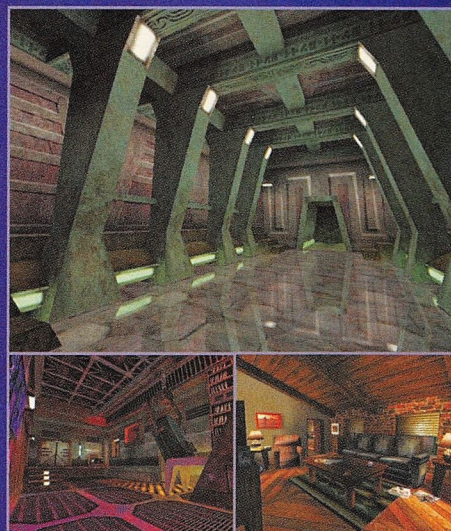
Many people will remember Prey, a game which was supposed to be serious competition for id Software's Quake series. Prey was an ambitious first-person shooter which followed an American Indian, Talon Brave, who was abducted by aliens. 3D Realms created the Prey engine in-house.

THE PROBLEM

Prey's development was rocky, with large waves of team members quitting no less than three times. At one point in 1996 the decision was made to make the game hardware accelerated only, requiring a lengthy rebuild of the game. A new consultant also chucked out large portions of the game, radically changing the story. In the third exodus, the engine programmer and longest serving team member, William Scarborough quit. This seems to have been the final curtain call for the game. In 2000, references to Prey were removed from 3D Realms' website.

THE POTENTIAL

Prey had amazing-sounding portal technology, which allowed you to travel and look through into other levels and interact with players through them, on other servers. It also supported coloured lighting and pre-



calculated radiosity lighting, features later seen in Quake II and Half Life. If Prey had launched before or soon after Quake, it would have looked great. Unfortunately the features list is mostly comical today, with elements like "rooms over rooms" and "arched ceilings".

Developer: 3D Realms Publisher: GOD Circa: 1995-2000

Warcraft Adventures: Lord of the Clans

THE PLAN

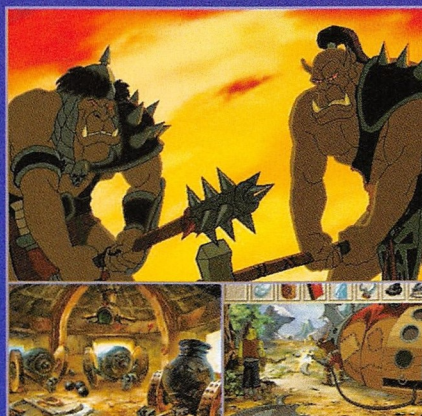
Blizzard games have always had a profusion of detail in their worlds, so the idea of a story-driven adventure game set in the Warcraft universe seemed natural. In it, you played the part of Thrall, an Orc trapped in the human land of Azeroth, raised by manipulative humans. It was to be a point-and-click adventure in the vein of Monkey Island, with still backgrounds & 2D artwork.

THE PROBLEM

Blizzard was leaving its comfort zone on this title. It would design the game and farm out most of its production to a Russian art house. Despite their best efforts, Blizzard internally weren't happy with the way the puzzles and adventure mechanics were panning out. They brought in consultants, but eventually decided that they couldn't make it compete with other products launching into the marketplace. Warcraft Adventures was cancelled mid 1998.

THE POTENTIAL

This game is yet another casualty on the



treacherous trail of the adventure game business. Many fans were upset at missing out on seeing the Warcraft world from an Orc's-eye view. Perhaps hardest to accept, is the fact that a major Orc character in the game was voiced by the same actor who did The Transformers' Optimus Prime, Peter Cullen. Can you imagine Orcs who sound like Optimus Prime? We've severely missed out there.

Developer: Blizzard Entertainment Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment Circa: 1998

Deep Cover

THE PLAN

Deep Cover was to be the second title from Irrational Games, following the critically acclaimed System Shock 2. It was a 1960s spy game with a dark, gritty and atmospheric feel, concerned with the Cold War. Looking at the track record of this company, this is quite an exciting concept.

THE PROBLEM

Deep Cover was being developed in the unique arrangement Irrational had with Looking Glass - Irrational would build the game, and Looking Glass would supply the engine and secure a publishing deal. Work was underway on Deep Cover, but around this time Looking Glass Studios fell into financial difficulties. They stopped paying Irrational, and although Microsoft finally signed on as publisher, it was too late. Irrational couldn't afford to wait, and they had moved onto a new (now also ill-fated) project, a PlayStation 2 game called The Lost.

THE POTENTIAL

Information on this game is scarce, but odds are that it would have been something special. All the major System Shock 2 people were working on it, so we can only imagine what they would have come up with. Perhaps it would have been similar to Splinter Cell with RPG elements? We may never know.



Developer: Irrational Games
Publisher: Looking Glass Studios
Circa: 1999-2000

Into The Shadows

THE PLAN

Into the Shadows was one of the most exciting titles back in frontier times, when games were gradually shifting over from DOOM-style sprite animated engines to true vector 3D. Into the Shadows looked like Quake ended up looking, but years earlier and with some seriously advanced effects like skeletal animation and compressed lightmaps, leading to the impressive shadows in the game. It was all about technology at the time, so Into the Shadows sent people's heads spinning. It featured trolls and ogres in 3rd-person sword fights, and it basically looked better than anything we'd ever seen before.

THE PROBLEM

The two engine programmers were Scandinavians fresh out of university, who dived headfirst into game development. They hired two artists, scored a deal with Scavenger and started cutting code. Sadly, Scavenger fell financially ill, making all of the titles under its banner DOA.

THE POTENTIAL

Into the Shadows is still remembered



nostalgically as one of the great potentials. Would it have been a hit? It probably would have had to launch before many of the competing 3D games of the time, which with only four people developing, seems unlikely. The lead programmer, Magnus Hogdahl went on to found Starbreeze Studios (responsible for last year's average hack 'em up Enclave).

Developer: Triton Productions/Starbreeze Publisher: Scavenger Circa: 1995-1996

Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels

THE PLAN

The original Full Throttle was one of the great Lucasarts adventure titles, alongside Sam & Max and Day of the Tentacle. In it, you're Ben, a gruff biker who deals out insults and fisticuffs in equal measure, going through a reckless gangland adventure. The sequel, Hell on Wheels took some steps away from the original by going to a 3D mode, as well as adding action-based fight scenes, with combo-button mashing instead

of pure cerebral adventure.

THE PROBLEM

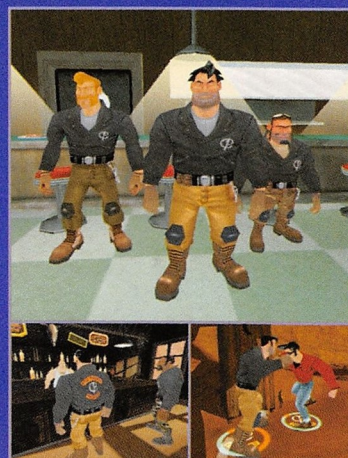
The game was planned for PC, PlayStation 2 and the Xbox, but a sudden announcement showed that the game was stopped dead in its tracks. Simon Jeffery, president of Lucasarts, made this statement: "We do not want to disappoint the many fans of Full Throttle, and hope everyone can understand how committed we are to delivering the best quality gaming experience that

we possibly can."

THE POTENTIAL

We were definitely looking forward to once again vicariously beating up enormous baddies by knuckling their nose rings onto the hard surface of a bar. Yet this was another savage blow to an adventure game community hoping for a point-and-click resurgence. Does this mean that publishers will shy away from funding adventure games in the future?

Developer: Triton Productions/Starbreeze Publisher: Scavenger Circa: 1995-1996



Fallout 3

THE PLAN

The third title in the famous Fallout series was set to be another RPG jewel in this much-loved franchise, following on from the groundbreaking Fallout and Fallout 2. This game was veiled in secrecy, using the code name "Van Buren", while never actually being announced by parent company Interplay. The game was going to set the hero "in a government quarantine protocol that was still being executed after the bombs fell", later escaping to meet with the Brotherhood of Steel.

THE PROBLEM

Sadly, Black Isle Studios, the developer of many world-beating computer games, was effectively shut down by Interplay. Almost everyone on the development teams were laid off, with executive orders descending from on high, forbidding the release of any screens or information about the game.

THE POTENTIAL

The graphics in Fallout 3 looked at least on-par with the well-received Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood of Steel which launched in 2000. Of course, the measure of games like this is buried in their content and long-term experiences. Who knows what this game could have offered in terms of story and gameplay? It will likely remain a mystery. The Fallout universe lives on however, in Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel for console. Perhaps there is hope after all...



Developer: Black Isle Studios
Publisher: Interplay Circa: 2003

Guardians: Agents of Justice

THE PLAN

Superficially resembling the modern Freedom Force, Guardians: Agents of Justice was an isometric action game featuring superheroes as the protagonists. It was to be a turn-based, squad-level title where you could design your heroes from scratch. It was an all-out war against criminal organisations, with a strategic layer of resource management. Simtex were famous for their Masters of Orion games, so there were high hopes for this title.

THE PROBLEM

Unfortunately, this game succumbed to the "Curse of the Superhero Game" which swallowed at least two other titles, Bullfrog's Indestructibles and another title based on a pen-and-paper game, called Champions. Apparently Simtex tried to transition Guardians from 8-bit to 16-bit art during development, requiring the recreation of the entirety of the game's art assets. Rumour has it that the game just wasn't as well-conceived as it could have been, leading



to lacklustre gameplay. Microprose eventually cancelled Guardians after numerous delays.

THE POTENTIAL

With a multiplayer mode that let you take on your friend's heroes, Guardians seemed to be a great concept, which was finally brought to life in Freedom Force. If Guardians had succeeded, perhaps we would have had the superhero renaissance we're having now, some years ago.

Developer: Simtex Publisher: Microprose Circa: 1998

X-COM: Alliance

THE PLAN

Based on the Unreal engine, X-COM Alliance was set to be the feather in this series' cap. With a long and venerable history of strategy and space combat games behind it, X-COM Alliance was going to take the X-COM world into uncharted space - the first-person shooter. In it, you were a squad commander with a team of soldiers and scientists in your charge. You could see camera views from several of the team members at once, ala Aliens. Your team had to strike deep into enemy territory, stealing information, repelling assaults and striking specific targets.

THE PROBLEM

X-COM Alliance was undoubtedly ambitious. Not only did it have numerous autonomous NPC actors, they were also supposed to have human frailties like fear, as well as being able to follow instructions, carry wounded teammates and simultaneously fight battles intelligently. From an era when NPC players were rudimentary at best, Alliance's goals seem incredibly lofty. In an



interview in January 2000, the developer admitted that Alliance was a game "full of bugs" and only 60-70 percent complete. Mysteriously, in May 2000, the project was put on "indefinite hold". It was never revived.

THE POTENTIAL

X-COM Alliance could have lead to an immediate era of advanced AI and squad-based games, although it only would have arrived one or two years earlier than the AI driven titles we are seeing today.

Developer: Microprose Publisher: Hasbro Interactive/Infogrames Circa: 2000-2001

Babylon 5: Into the Fire

THE PLAN

Babylon 5: Into the Fire was a space combat simulator set in the world of the sci-fi television show. It looked promising, approaching the level of games like X-Wing: Alliance, mixed into a classic sci-fi world with video footage of the show's actors. It seemed like a solid offering.

THE PROBLEM

The fate of this title is a genuine tragedy. In 2000

Sierra restructured their operations, deciding to stop work on this title and others. The ousted developers formed their own operation, called Sector 14 Studios. They wanted to continue working on the title, but Sierra refused to sell them a portion of existing game assets - nearly a year and a half's worth of work. To rebuild these things would have added years to the

schedule, putting the entire project - and its currency - out of date.

THE POTENTIAL

Babylon 5 always had a vocal fan base which was naturally outraged when the game was cruelly harpooned by Sierra. It was even a blow for fans of the TV show, as the last remaining unseen footage by the cast and crew - shot exclusively for the game - would never see the light of day.



Developer: Sector 14 Studios Publisher: Sierra Studios Circa: 1998-2000

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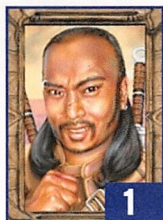
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If you are, you'll win ATI's hot new high end videocard, which is around twice as fast as a 9800. Yowsers. Hell, it's so hot we don't even know what it's called yet. Thanks to HIS and ATI for coming through with the good stuff.



CHARACTERS

WHAT GAME DID THESE CHARACTERS STAR IN?



1



2



3



4



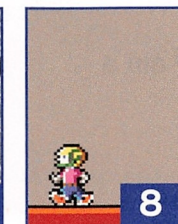
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DATES

MATCH THE GAME TO THE YEAR
OF RELEASE

- _____ Phantasmagoria
- _____ Planescape: Torment
- _____ Police Quest: In Pursuit
of the Death Angel
- _____ Powerslide
- _____ Prince of Persia

YEAR

- A 1987
- B 1990
- C 1995
- D 1998
- E 1999

DIFFICULTY LEVELS

MATCH UP THE GAME WITH ITS SELECTION
OF DIFFICULTY LEVELS

- _____ Civilization III
- _____ Deus Ex
- _____ Duke Nukem 3D
- _____ Quake III: Arena
- _____ Thief: The Dark Project

DIFFICULTY

- A Chieftain, Warlord, Prince, Monarch, Emperor, Deity
- B Easy, Medium, Hard, Realistic
- C I can win, Bring it on, Hurt me plenty, Hardcore, Nightmare
- D Normal, Hard, Expert
- E Piece of cake, Let's rock, Come get some, Damn I'm good

NUMBERS

WHAT SCORES DID THE
FOLLOWING GAMES GET IN PCPP?

- _____ Age of Empires
- _____ Daikatana
- _____ Ghost Recon
- _____ Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear
- _____ Sid Meier's Sim Golf
- _____ Soul Reaver
- _____ Starcraft
- _____ Terminator: Future Shock
- _____ Total Annihilation
- _____ Zork: Grand Inquisitor



DEVELOPERS

MATCH THE GAME TO ITS DEVELOPER

- _____ Army Men RTS
- _____ Death Rally
- _____ Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3
- _____ Flight Unlimited 3
- _____ Lands of Lore
- _____ MDK
- _____ Project Eden
- _____ Shattered Steel
- _____ Take No Prisoners
- _____ Vangers

DEVELOPER

- A 3D Realms
- B Bioware
- C Buka
- D Core Design
- E Ion Storm
- F Looking Glass
- G Pandemic
- H Raven
- I Shiny
- J Westwood

PEOPLE

MATCH THE PERSON TO HIS DEVELOPMENT STUDIO

- _____ Brian Reynolds
- _____ Bruce Shelley
- _____ Ed Del Castillo
- _____ Gabe Newell
- _____ George Broussard
- _____ Peter Molyneux
- _____ Ray Muzyka
- _____ Sam Houser
- _____ Tim Cain
- _____ Warren Spector

STUDIO

- A 3D Realms
- B Big Huge Games
- C Bioware
- D Ensemble Studios
- E Ion Storm
- F Lionhead Studios
- G Liquid Entertainment
- H Rockstar Games
- I Troika Games
- J Valve Software

LETTERS

WHAT DO THE FOLLOWING COMMON GAMING ABBREVIATIONS STAND FOR?

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| BFG _____ | LOMAC _____ |
| FPS _____ | MMORPG _____ |
| GTA _____ | NPC _____ |
| HUD _____ | PVP _____ |
| KKND _____ | RTS _____ |



QUOTES

NAME THE GAMES FROM WHICH THE FOLLOWING QUOTES WERE TAKEN

"Butt-kicking for goodness!"

"Don't trust the skull..."

"How can you choose cold metal over the splendour of flesh?"

"For FREEDOM!"

"Good morning, Gordon"

"Hello caller, you're on Chatterbox..."

"Stop touching me!"

"Time to kick ass and chew bubblegum.
And I'm all out of gum"

"You fight like a dairy farmer"

"Your architecture isn't much different from the Autumn's"

WORLDS

YOU JOURNEYED THROUGH THESE FICTIONAL LOCATIONS IN WHICH GAMES?

Amn

Britannia

Daventry

Liberty City

Novistrana

Omikron

Rubi-Ka

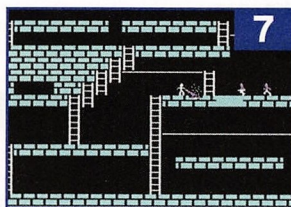
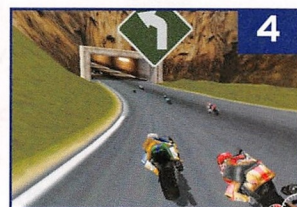
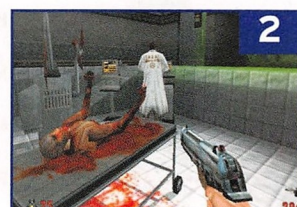
Stark & Arcadia

The City

Xen

SCREENSHOTS

SIMPLY IDENTIFY THE FOLLOWING GAMES FROM THEIR SCREENSHOTS



1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8



HARDWARE

MATCH THE PRODUCT NAME TO THE COMPONENT TYPE

- _____ Arctic Silver
- _____ DigiDice
- _____ FX-53
- _____ Gainward Golden Sample
- _____ Koolance Exos
- _____ Mouse Bungee
- _____ Mouse Skatez
- _____ Raptor
- _____ Thrustmaster Cougar
- _____ Vapochill

COMPONENT

- A** Case with integrated cooling unit
- B** CPU
- C** External cooling kit
- D** Hard Drive
- E** Joystick
- F** Mini PC
- G** Mouse cable holder
- H** Teflon tape
- I** Thermal paste
- J** Video card

ENGINEERING

MATCH THE GAME TO THE ENGINE

- _____ Atlantis
- _____ Freedom Force
- _____ Icewind Dale
- _____ Neverwinter Nights
- _____ No One Lives Forever
- _____ Shadow Warrior
- _____ Sin
- _____ System Shock 2
- _____ Terminator: SkyNet
- _____ The Wheel of Time

ENGINE

- A** Aurora
- B** Build
- C** Dark
- D** Infinity
- E** Lithtech
- F** NetImmerse
- A** Omni3D
- H** Quake
- I** Unreal
- J** XnGine

DECRYPT

WHAT DO THE FOLLOWING TECH ABBREVIATIONS STAND FOR?

- | | |
|-------------|-----------------|
| DSLAM _____ | BIOS _____ |
| PCI _____ | CMOS _____ |
| ISA _____ | AGP _____ |
| ASCII _____ | WWW _____ |
| ADSL _____ | DDR SDRAM _____ |

YOUR DETAILS

- Name _____
- Street Address _____
- Postal Address (if different) _____
- Day-time Phone Number _____ Email _____

a roleplayer's
FANTASY.

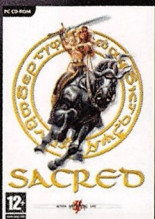


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Adventure Reinvented"

- NVIDIA

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SACRED



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- Co-operative & pvp multiplayer modes



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GAMES IN REVIEW

As gamers, we tend to be a little too pre-occupied with length. We subscribe to the theory that bigger always equals better. We want the games we pay ninety bucks for to be enormous 100 hour epics we can replay to our heart's content. After all, if something is good then it stands to reason that more of it must be, like, an even more good thing.

There's a certain undeniable logic at work there. If we enjoy an experience then, chances are, we'd like to experience it again. But I can't help but think it's not telling the full story. Yet browse any forum and gamers will be up in arms that Corridor Shooter X can be finished in less than ten hours. Or Immersive Reality Sim sucks because a friend "clocked" it quicker than it took to install.

This hysterical epidemic has reached the stage where gamers seem to base their purchasing decisions solely around the number of hours to completion. Of course, journalists are far from immune, too; I've been to countless press conferences or demonstrations where the only question out of my colleagues' mouths is "How many hours of gameplay?" Since when did game length equate to game quality? Surely there are far more crucial factors at work.

Say you've just finished Call of Duty and sat back thinking, "Gee, I wish it was a bit longer". Why did you want it to keep going? Because you were enjoying a well-designed game. Play it through again and you'll still be enjoying a well-designed game - albeit minus the surprise of the scripted events.



Have you ever finished a game, sat back, hit your stopwatch and thought, "Gee, I enjoyed that because it was just the right length"? Or "War of the Ring, eh? A fairly average game, but boy did it nail my arbitrary cut-off point for total gaming hours"?

No, of course, you haven't. It's absurd. You enjoy and keep playing (and, crucially, replay) a game because it entertains, immerses and challenges. You don't enjoy a game because it takes 22 hours to complete.

If a game is well-designed and

expertly paced then you'll be satisfied even if its narrative arc touches down at barely a tick over nine hours. Games are about far more than any allegedly quantifiable statistic. Enjoyment lies in the experience not the extension. Length doesn't matter. It's what you do within it that counts.

David Wildgoose
Editor

- 79 Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow
- 82 V8 Supercars 2
- 84 Counter-Strike: Condition Zero
- 86 Silent Storm
- 88 One Must Fall: Battlegrounds
- 89 Raven Shield: Athena Sword

GOLD AWARD	HIGH DISTINCTION	DISTINCTION	CREDIT	PASS	FAIL
The ultimate accolade. A game that receives a Gold Award is an essential purchase, and the only excuse for not owning it is either not having a powerful enough PC, or not having a PC at all. Or arms. It represents a new direction in gaming, a new benchmark against which all others will be measured. It defines its genre, or creates a new one. It is gaming. You must own it.	This is the finest in gaming. A fresh concept, a perfect execution, a meaningful extension to a tried and tested format, one or all of these are required for this score. We strongly recommend the purchase of each High Distinction game, but extremely fussy gamers may want to skip those HD games that don't also receive Gold Awards.	An intriguing new concept or a bold new direction that manages to pull its new trick off with a reasonable degree of flair. You will be impressed, at either the graphics, the gameplay or some other new element that you may not have encountered before. Or perhaps this is a familiar gaming concept, but one executed so well it's almost - but not quite - an essential purchase.	Solid, playable, largely bug-free, entertaining and maybe even a bit unexpected, these are the hallmarks of a game of Credit. You may have seen it all before, but you won't mind, because a Credit game does what it says on the box - it plays well and it keeps you hooked. An essential purchase? Not necessarily, but worth consideration.	A game that receives a pass is playable, but its concept may be flawed, its extras may be lacking or its graphical enhancements may have fallen off somewhere in a lengthy bug-fixing process. And bugs there may be, although in the end the game will, as we say, work. Purchase if you're curious, but discerning gamers will probably look for something more substantial.	There are more than 5000 games released each year. Some are gems. Some are merely unremarkable. Others are nothing more than a shameless grab for cash. Graphics will be rudimentary and gameplay will be worse. If you see someone considering a game that has failed, gently take them by the elbow and hurl them out of the shop. It's your duty as a good citizen.
90+	85-100	75-84	65-74	50-64	0-49



Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell

Pandora Tomorrow

Sam Fisher gets the tight black gear on for another sneaky escapade

Developer: Ubisoft ■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Distributor: Ubi Soft ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M ■ Available: Now

Pandora Tomorrow chronicles more of the adventures of Sam Fisher, badass, black-ops, deniable stealth operative. Can it live up to the original? We think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

As our story begins, the US Embassy in Dili, East Timor is ravaged by a truck bomb. An Indonesian militia group called the Darah Dan Doa brutally invades the blasted structure and seizes some expensive hostages. The militia leader, a sadistic chap called Suhadi Sadono has set up his own life insurance policy - embedded terrorist cells around the world are at the ready to release the smallpox

and his new covert cohorts, the Shadownet spies come in. Due to the worldwide scope of this threat, Sam Fisher can't solve it alone. These friendly neighbourhood men in black collaborate with Sam to disable the smallpox-packing Tangos around the world, against the clock.

Back in Black

Once again, you've got to go in silently, gather information and work out what's really going on. This title is another tasty package of everything that made the first Splinter Cell great. As such, there's a lot

patrol of curious hired guns. You'll use your thermal vision to detect laser beams, night vision to crawl through pitch dark ventilation ducts, clambering and swinging like a monkey en route to your destination.

There are a few new features, such as the ability to draw attention by whistling, as well as firing your weapon while dangling from overhead pipes. Also, interiors look much improved, which makes a big difference. For the most part, Pandora Tomorrow is essentially more of the same - which should suit fans just fine. Splinter Cell is probably the best stealth action title on the market, and it looks like it'll be holding that position.

Q and M

You've got your trusty assortment of gadgetry once again, with the stock night vision and thermographic (heat sensitive) vision built into your googly helmet. You've also got "enhanced reality", which is a bubbly way of saying that little icons are projected over the objectives, superimposed in your HUD. You've got your optic cable for discreetly scoping out the contents of a room, under a door or through a ventilation grille. EMP rounds are for temporarily disabling cameras and other electronic devices, but

An elite spy can casually stroll behind you, put you in a headlock then break your neck

virus into population centres, unless they are given the "Pandora Tomorrow" code every day, which indicates that he's alive and hasn't been taken captive. This in turn puts extra leverage on the relevant Governments to acquiesce to the terrorist's demands. It seems like a situation where the aggressors can't lose.

Of course, this is where Sam Fisher

of 'Sam Fisher vs the security devices', seeing you shooting out many lights and cameras, avoiding mines, laser tripwires and motion sensors in your passage through uber-secure zones in embassies, terrorist strongholds and on moving trains. You'll hack into security terminals. You'll stand stock still, pressed against the wall as you avoid the

SYSTEM

NEED

1GHz CPU, 128Mb RAM, 2.5 Gb HDD, DX8.1 compatible video card - GeForce 3 or higher (GeForce 4 MX and GeForce Go are not supported), or ATI Radeon 8500 or higher), Broadband for multiplayer.

WANT

1.8GHz CPU, 512Mb RAM, 2.5Gb HDD, GeForce FX 128Mb / ATI Radeon 9800 or better, broadband with at least 128 Kbits uplink.

MULTIPLAYER

32 Yes, only four players though!

ONLINE

An incremental update to the world of Sam Fisher, with an innovative multiplayer mode.



Sam Fisher. The real Serious Sam.



if you hit a person with them, they're immobilized for several seconds by the high-voltage goodness. You also have EMP grenades, which will knock out everything in a room. A Disposable Pick will bore out the cylinder of a locked door, allowing fast entry.

Semi-Security

Thankfully, no one's yet subjected players to an utterly realistic game involving armed intrusion and response, because it would be severely depressing. Pandora Tomorrow walks a fine tightrope, allowing you to make some mistakes and then recover. Most alerts are temporary, don't result in mission failure and can

often be rectified by marking time or hacking into a terminal.

The music is especially useful here, as it acts as a constant barometer of your security status. If the tempo goes up a notch, you're in trouble. But when you retreat and crouch in a secluded corner for a few moments, if the music returns to the familiar cat-burglar tempo, you're good to go. The music is a great indicator, combined with your stealth meter and paying close attention to the guards' voices and behaviour.

With these three metrics, you're well on your way to solving any Splinter Cell puzzle. There's some interesting twists, such as the first mission where you hide in plain sight from a sniper who is using night vision – you advance by staying in the beam of an automated spotlight, where the intense brightness obscures you from him. After you stumble, your foes won't always recover back to a "zero alert" level immediately.

In certain missions, the guards will don flak jackets at the first sign of trouble. One more alert and they'll put on bulletproof helmets. So your offensive

options vanish as you continue to make mistakes. However, after a few minutes, they'll crank the each alert level back down again, so as with many other aspects of this game, patience is a virtue.

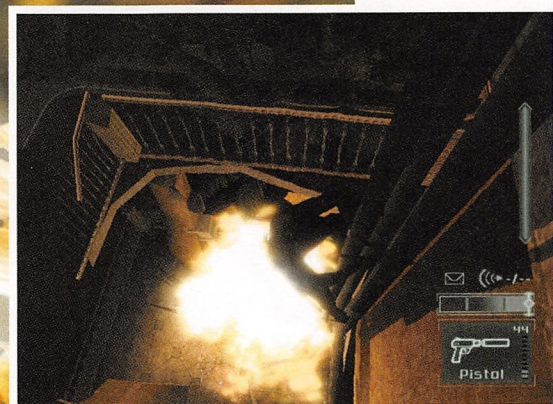
Straight Lines

If there's anything to be criticised, it's surely the game's linearity. Despite having manifold methods of climbing and avoiding detection, you're almost always railroaded into a single path, when it seems like the environment should allow you to try things out many different ways. However, this is really the only major issue with the game – the presentation is otherwise absolutely top-notch, delivering a very entertaining experience in spite of this shortcoming.

On PC, we're clearly the luckiest platform – Pandora Tomorrow undeniably looks the best on a high end videocard, while the fairly tricky controls are well handled by mouse and keyboard. Also, the PC version is the only platform to support saving at any given moment – an absolute necessity for this game, as it sometimes reduces you to guesswork, or trial and error.

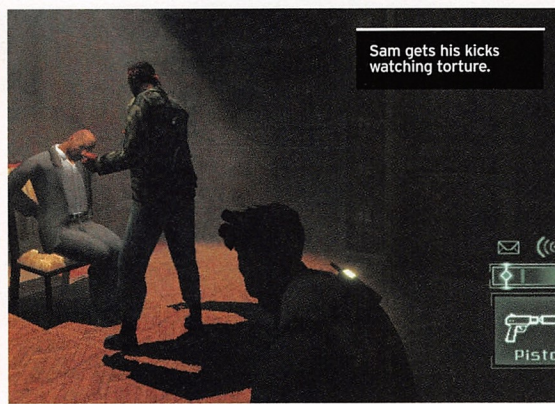
Multiplayer

The mode that everyone's been waiting for, multiplayer Splinter Cell is a fantastic Spy vs Grunt kind of experience, pitting teams with radically different capabilities against each other. One team will actually

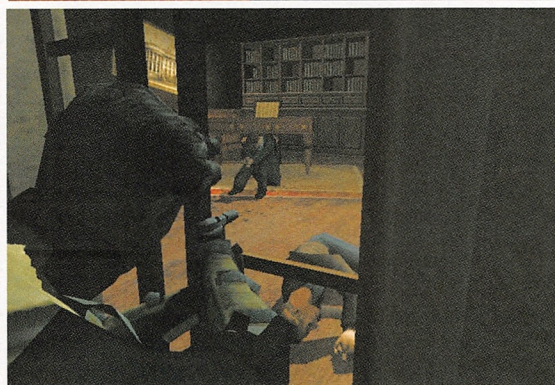


PRODUCT PLACEMENT

Seems that Sam's losing his edge in his old age, having sold out to a certain manufacturer of PDAs, which appear often and regularly throughout the game. You'll see the logo so often that damn, that PDA will start to look seriously appealing... in fact, it's about time you bought one, isn't it? The device gets such top billing that Pandora Tomorrow is one more sharp reminder of the looming era of nauseatingly blatant advertising embedded in games. And no, you can't choose to switch off the adverts.



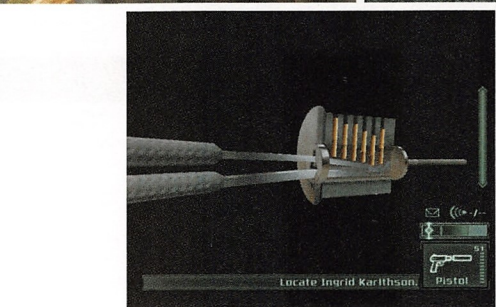
Sam gets his kicks watching torture.



Hidden and - yes - dangerous.

COUNTERMEASURES FOR ONE

In Pandora Tomorrow you can deploy grenades that distract passive defences. Now, the idea of a foot soldier using countermeasures is a pretty Star Trek sort of concept, especially as these ones resemble the anti-radar aluminium "chaff" which fighter jets will deploy when being chased by radar-guided missiles. When you're standing on the ground, nothing shouts "Here I am, kill me!" like a huge fluttering field of tinfoil confetti. As far as we know, there's no such thing as a human-seeking missile that homes in on a soldier's sweaty shorts or similar, but if there were, we'd probably want a flare launcher built into the waistband as well.



beam into every dark corner.

Of course, the other side of the conflict is staffed by the graceful Shadownet spies, ala Sam Fisher, with many of the same tools as you'll find in single player mode. You've got the spy camera and chaff, spy bullets which highlight a mercenary's position on radar (for your whole team), EMP rounds and neck-breaking acrobatics. Alongside this elegant espionage and counter-espionage depth, you've got the obligatory exploding barrels that go off when shot and fire extinguishers which will release an obscuring cloud of foam every time they're hit. It's a masterful combination of the furtive and the bombastic.

In close-quarters battle, the mercs of course have a firepower advantage, but an elite Shadownet player can stop you dead in your tracks with an EMP bullet, casually stroll behind you, put you in a headlock, heckle you over the voice communication system, then break your neck.

Fourplay

The game modes in multiplayer Pandora Tomorrow are almost all objective-based, adding extra spice to the already intricate layers of possibility. Neutralisation mode involves hacking the security system, a

process that can be halted and resumed. Extraction mode is similar to Capture the Flag, where you extract virus containers from one location to another and secure them. Finally Sabotage mode involves neutralising a system by hacking in using a modem.

There is a four-player maximum to multiplayer in Pandora Tomorrow, which, we know, sounds shocking at face value. It may seem like a console-ridden limitation, but in all fairness, there is so much going on in this mode that to add many more players could make it overly chaotic and cause it to lose the signature Splinter Cell tension. Also, you can weight the game any way you like - for example, three versus one.

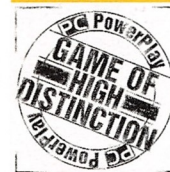
Overall, Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow is a solid sequel to the original game, looks fantastic and adds a new standard for this sort of thing. Recommended very highly indeed.

Ed Dawson

play the part of a ham-fisted Argus Mercenary crew, complete with machine guns, tasers and grenades. You've got extraordinary motion tracking vision, as well as electromagnetic tracking - which highlights machines and electronics, showing off a spectacular X-ray view of their buzzing internals.

As you're trying to protect the objectives, you're on the user end of the security system - it will alert you to breaches, highlighting them in your HUD, whereby you come running, ala some disposable Bond henchman, with guns blazing. This foil to the Shadownet spies is exceedingly well constructed. Playing as the mercenary, you suddenly get a change of perspective. Rather than enjoying the enveloping shroud of blackness, it seems far too dark in the environments, you wish someone would turn the damn lights on while you swivel your submachine gun about impatiently and run back and forth, waving its light

RATING



FOR

Superb online play. Solid stealth action

AGAINST

Linear missions

OVERALL

An incremental update to the world of Sam Fisher, with an innovative multiplayer mode.

93

Open wheel racing is for sissies.



V8 Supercars 2

It's not just about Ford vs Holden anymore

Developer: Codemasters ■ Publisher: Codemaster ■ Distributor: Atari ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

P3-667
128MB RAM
64MB Video card
1GB HDD

WANT

P4-2GHz+
256MB RAM
GeForceFX
1GB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.bathurst.nsw.gov.au
Bathurst is about more than just Mount Panorama you know. Check out the Autumn Heritage Festival, for instance. Includes a walk in the park!

Here at PC PowerPlay we're always on about game content. Does game x have enough content to justify a \$100 price tag? Why does game y only have three planes if it's supposed to be a history of aerial warfare?

Say what you like about V8 Supercars 2 (aka TOCA 4, aka Race Driver 2), there's no way in hell you can accuse it of not having enough content. Although the Australian label might make it seem that this game is all about V8 racing, Race Driver 2 aims to be more of a snapshot of racing as it exists today.

That's right, pretty much every major racing form you can think of is in this game, somewhere. Big grunty V8s at Philip Island? Well, obviously. Open-wheel Formula Fords in the UK? Yup. WRC in Spain? You got it. Japanese performance cars such as the Skyline on street circuits? Oh yeah. Nostalgic Mustang '68 showdowns on modern US racing tracks? Yes, even those.

All things to all men

In other words, Race Driver 2 aims to be the ultimate racing simulator, a one-pit-stop-shop for all your racing needs. Buy this game, implies Codemasters, and you will never need to buy another racing sim. Ever.

Of course, this kind of ambition



immediately runs into problems. For a start, Race Driver 2 can't quite decide which demographic it wants to aim for. Does it want to be the greatest racer ever for the everyman? Or is it a nosebleed sim for the kind of person who knows everything there possibly is to know about the latest Commodore but is still too young to have a driver's license?

For the everyman, Race Driver 2 is too much of a sim. You can't just hold down the accelerator and attempt to steer through the corners without hitting anything. You can't navigate a tight course by bouncing off the walls or scraping along the outside of a chicane. Try that and your car will quickly disintegrate, and the race will be over. Fender-benders with the opposition can ruin your chances in a race three seconds after the light goes

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

Race Driver 2 cannot be faulted on sound. Put simply, the sound is freaking fantastic. Road surfaces, doppler effects on trackside objects, and the engines! Each engine has been meticulously modelled to sound extremely similar to the real thing, and what's more, once you've mashed your car into a couple of barriers or scraped it along the opposition, you'll be able to hear dragging bodywork, slipping gears, injured engines and all those other great sounds that make professionals whimper as you take the poor thing for another six laps instead of retiring to fight another day.

green. In short, you need skill.

Sounds great, you may cry, especially if you're the kind of person who wants a glossy, exciting racing simulator with the good looks of Need For Speed Underground but the brainpower of Grand Prix Legends.

Cursus honorum

And yet, the sim focus of Race Driver 2 doesn't seem to go far enough. Casual racers will probably find it too hard, but dedicated simmers will be pissed off by



DEVILISH DETAILS

They say the devil is in the details, but in Race Driver 2 he's obviously taken the day off. It's not that the objects in the game have low detail, just that there seems to have been a focus on effects rather than raw visuals. To explain: every car has an ultra-gloss paint finish that makes the best use of environmental mapping, reflecting trackside objects and the sky overhead. Looks good if you've got the PC-beef to turn it on, but the actual cars don't have all the little niggly details race-heads love so much. Petrol caps, rivets, door handles, windscreen-wipers all come second place to the special effects. Which is disappointing.

keep you on the track for the maximum amount of time. The training mission, for instance, starts in the middle of a race. A helpful Scotsman gives instruction, from the simple "the longer you hold down the brake button the faster you stop" to the increasingly complex, such as advice on how to avoid wheel-spin at the beginning of a race.

From the back of a motorhome, you set off across the world to bring ruin and damnation upon your enemies. And after you've driven a couple of dozen races in half as many different race modes, you'll begin to notice Race Driver 2's other big problem.

Render unto Caesar

As a dedicated touring car game, Race Driver 2 would have been unstoppable. Its capable but not over-flashy graphics engine is perfect for rendering big V8 circuits which are nothing but wide roads, hills and crash barriers. But put the game on a course where the organisers haven't cut down all the trees to make room for yobbo tent cities, and the graphics start to look a bit ordinary.

Of course, this means the game is actually likely to run on your PC. Codemasters has done a good job hitting a performance point that makes the game a reasonable prospect

for someone running a two year old machine. The 'need' specs at the top of this review indicate the best minimum results - turn off a few more effects and the game will still run fine on a more modest machine.

And yet, perhaps because of the graphics engine or perhaps because of Race Driver 2's ancestry, every race somehow still feels like a V8 supercar race. Especially the rally courses, which have suspiciously flat road surfaces, suspiciously wide tracks and suspiciously few corners.

The open-wheel races feel like you're taking a friend's kit Formula Ford (rich friend, I know) out for a bash at Eastern Creek. Even the street races in the funky Japanese production cars feel like they're being run on professional circuits.

Veni Vidi Vici

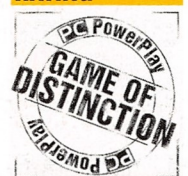
When it comes to the titular V8s though, the game really comes into its own. For us here in Australia, all the European and US crap that's included in the game is just a free bonus - we want to get out on the mountain and thrash it up. And yes, it feels like you're there. It feels real. The cars feel big and heavy and you can almost feel yourself getting mashed against the doorframe every time you take a corner too hard.

Race Driver 2 is an odd game to score. Focus on its entirety and it comes across as full of goodness but slightly unpolished. But look instead at the V8s as the core of the game and everything else as a free bonus (and there's a hell of a lot of bonus) and this becomes a worthy addition to any serious revhead's collection.

Anthony Fordham

This shot, proudly brought to by...

RATING



FOR

Jack of all trades... Variety of cars Career mode

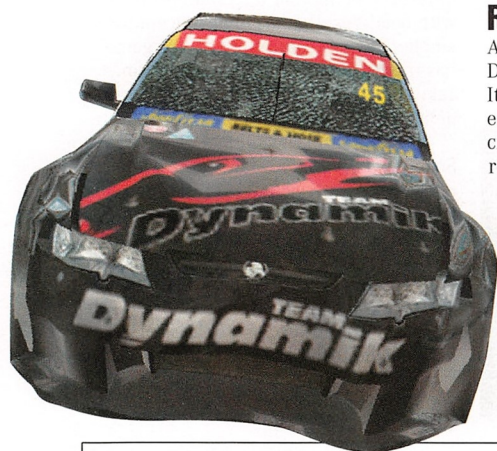
AGAINST

...master of none? Object detail Samey races

OVERALL

For when too much racing is barely enough!

82





Counter-Strike Condition Zero

The long and winding road has led us to a dead end, folks

Developer: Turtle Rock/Ritual Entertainment ■ Publisher: Valve ■ Distributor: Sierra ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

PIII 500 MHz
96MB RAM
16MB video card
500MB HDD

WANT

PIII 800 MHz
128MB RAM
32+ MB video card
1.8GB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.flysteam.co.uk
Arguably more
interesting
information on
Steam-Powered
Engines...

What a smashing great game Counter-Strike is. There's absolutely no denying that it is one of the greatest multiplayer mods in existence. It's been such an online success that there are still servers going strong five years down the track, with no signs of its popularity abating. The release of Counter-Strike: Condition Zero, then, is testament to Valve's faith in the Counter-Strike experience. However, it's sadly obvious that somewhere along the line, their concept for a single-player Counter-Strike

product had to be re-invented, and re-invented again.

Double Trouble?

Upon installation, Condition Zero dumps two games on your hard drive. One is simply titled Condition Zero, and the other goes by the more intriguing name, Condition Zero: Deleted Scenes. No, it's not a collection of wacky Counter-Strike clips. It is, in fact, what was originally the whole focus of the Condition Zero project. Deleted Scenes is a single-player campaign that takes you on a journey around the world in the blood-splattered shoes of a counter-terrorist agent. However, Condition Zero: Deleted Scenes is also proof of this very product's journey through development hell.

Even the name itself is surprisingly

self-depreciatory. As we all know, 'Deleted Scenes' are usually the offcuts from a film that have been discarded because they're not up to scratch, so is Valve trying to tell us something? "Thanks for your money, kid. Here, take this game that turned out to be so disappointing that we thought we'd label it 'the rejected version'. Oh, sorry, what did we call it? Oh yes, 'Deleted Scenes'. Sounds a bit better, eh?" You could be forgiven for feeling a little insulted.

So what ended up being undeserving enough of the original title, Condition Zero? Counter-Strike of course. The difference being that it's Counter-Strike with bots. Yes, that original concept for a single-player Counter-Strike style game has finally emerged in its purest form. Take the Counter-Strike mod, remove the online element, and voila!

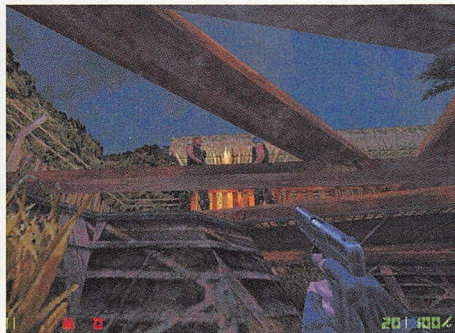
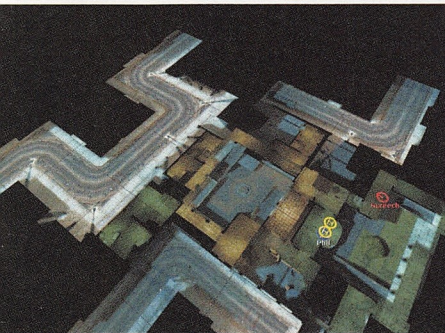
So, back onto the subject of Deleted Scenes for a moment. Let's take a closer look. It uses the original Half-Life engine (though it's tarted up somewhat) and the counter-terrorism concept from Counter-Strike, but Deleted Scenes is very much your run-of-the-mill shooter. It plays, and looks, like it should have been released around the time Soldier of Fortune hit the shelves.

The first mission in the game, Recoil, is a truly dreadful start. Hordes of an

BOT TO TROT

Condition Zero's version of Counter-Strike looks identical to the same old Counter-Strike we've played for years now, with hardly any noticeable visual improvement to the models or textures. There really isn't anything new here, other than the bots, that you can't get from logging on and downloading from www.counter-strike.net. And if you want bots, well you can even get third-party bots for your offline pleasure at bot.counter-strike.net. However, we must say that Condition Zero's excellent bot AI can't be beaten by the user-made bots that are available. It really is the best thing about this release.

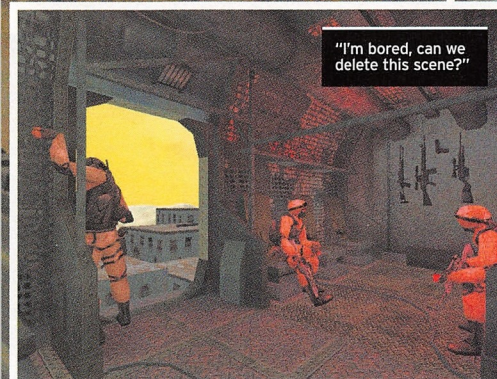




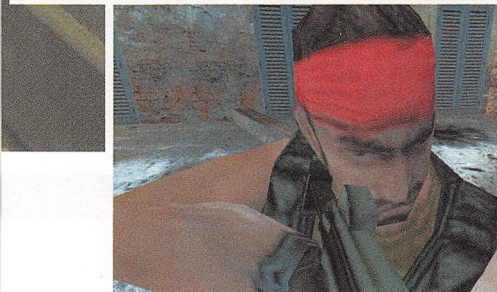
Five development teams made this.



Ouch.



"I'm bored, can we delete this scene?"



HOT POTATO

So what happened to the original Condition Zero concept? Originally planned by Valve about three years ago, the project was first given to developer Rogue. Valve then mysteriously took the project back and continued work on it internally. Then Gearbox were brought on board. However, before they could probably even type the words Condition Zero into their design doc, Valve snatched it back and gave the job to Ritual Entertainment. However, unhappy with its progress, Valve took Ritual off the project, and we suspect, canned the game altogether, only to have it resurface in some sort of completed form as 'Deleted Scenes' on the Condition Zero install disc. Finally, Turtle Rock Studios were brought in to create the Counter-Strike single-player bot match to ensure there was a decent game in the box.

identical Arab enemy model come charging at you as you backtrack over the same small map roughly four times. It's depressingly poor in both gameplay and design, and most gamers would find it hard to stick with Deleted Scenes any further beyond this very first simplistic mission. Thankfully, the missions - and level design - do improve. But the overriding feeling you get as a gamer playing Deleted Scenes is that you're running through and shooting stuff on autopilot. With its linear missions, dull objectives, and predictable shooter-play, it tends to play like the ultimate FPS cliché.

Valve obviously thought so too, and so it ceased to be the focus of the much-hyped Condition Zero, only to be relegated to a supporting role.

Redeeming Romp

We were surprised then to discover that Condition Zero - and we're talking about the 'main' game now (which it turns out is the original Counter-Strike with bots) - is still ridiculously playable and fun. It feels just like the real thing. As if we needed any reminder, though, that Counter-Strike is bloody good. Yet still, unless you're sick to death of it, you'll

keep playing. And keep playing.

The success of this single-player game is that the bot AI is exceptional. Really impressive. So good, in fact, that you could be fooled into thinking they were human players. Observing them play each other when in ghost mode will prove to you just how intelligently the bots make their way around the map and perform their duties. They twitch their view back and forth to check if they're being followed, they camp if they need to guard over a freshly planted bomb or if they want to deny the rescue of a few remaining hostages, they leap down off balconies to chase you, they switch weapons when the situation calls for it and they just generally 'do the right thing'. Your teammates also regularly chit-chat to each other about where they are on the map, the location of enemies encountered and the status of the bomb or hostages. If only human teammates were this conscientious.

The whole structure of the game has also been given a shot in the arm with the player having to conquer a series of stages made up of three maps each in order to move up to the next tier of difficulty. The player chooses their own

squad out of a gallery of AI controlled counter-terrorist agents of varying skills, but you begin the game only being able to afford teammates with low skill, co-op and bravery. Winning a few rounds eventually unlocks far more 'experienced' teammates who cost more to include in your team but guarantee a more successful game. Divvying up your handful of points to create a team of 'players' of truly varied skill is a nice way of simulating what anyone would find on a real-life Counter-Strike server.

Objectives must also be met in order to successfully progress to the next round. Getting a quota of kills with specific weapons, for instance, is all part of qualifying. With three difficulty levels, anyone who's currently playing Counter-Strike would still find a pretty tough challenge here. And yes, there are a few new maps to play.

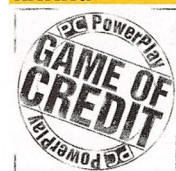
But when it comes down to it, you can have exactly the same experience as this by downloading the freely-available Counter-Strike mod and map pack, and joining one of the many servers out there still packed full of human opponents. You can even download Counter-Strike bots if it's the offline experience you're after.

It makes us wonder just who Condition Zero was made for in the end... Gamers with no access to the internet who want to play this "Counter-Strike thing" they've heard so much about? Counter-Strike fans who want to keep playing after all their buddies go to bed?

The reality is that Deleted Scenes is a huge disappointment, and that Counter-Strike with bots is hardly a substitute for Ritual's failed single-player game. As it is, Condition Zero just looks set to satisfy the clueless consumer and irritate the educated Counter-Strike community who were expecting so much more.

Eliot Fish

RATING



FOR

It's still CS. Bot AI is quality.

AGAINST

Deleted scenes should have stayed deleted. You can get bots for free.

OVERALL

A schizophrenic package that fails to justify its price tag.

68



Silent Storm

Taking turns in killing every single Gerry in the room

Developer: Nival Interactive ■ Publisher: JoWood ■ Distributor: www.gamesuniverse.com.au ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

CPU 600MHz
128MB RAM
32MB video card
2.5GB hard disk
space

WANT

CPU 2.2MHz
512MB RAM
128MB video card
3GB hard disk space

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.silentstorm-online.com
As Mick Jagger once said, "Patch me up, patch me up I'll never stop".

Utterly sick of World War II inspired computer games? Well, after the last few years of PC gaming you have every right to be. One look at Silent Storm's 'Saving Private Ryan' style box art and I must admit my eyes glazed over. All I could hear coming from Mr. Wildgoose's mouth was "ba ba ba review... ba ba ba X-Com" – hold on a second, did he say X-Com? Well, if ever there was a PC game to tickle my nostalgia bone, it would be X-Com: Enemy Unknown. In a graphically accelerated sea of tired shooters, sims

and MMORPGs, the prospect of chowing down on some good old turn-based gameplay is certainly worth having to put up with a few more "authentic weapons with realistic trajectories".

Tasty Tactics

X-Com is a fair enough reference point, but you may as well namecheck Fallout Tactics and Jagged Alliance in the same breath. Silent Storm is a predictable continuation of this style of turn-based tactical combat gameplay. The special sauce in Nival Interactive's sandwich, however, is the way that they have integrated a fancy physics engine into the tried and true tactical combat formula to give the proceedings a real sense of pow and pizzazz. Throw in a plot that revolves around an alternate-world World War II scenario (with a sci-fi twist), a smattering of role-playing elements, plus a detailed graphics engine and you have everything required to keep gamers away from sunlight for weeks.

The basic style of gameplay in Silent Storm replicates the many tactical combat games that have come before it. Action points determine how much each of your characters can accomplish on their given turn, and combat is a cocktail of 'to hit' percentages and item management. Your squad of up to six characters can be a

mixture of scout, sniper, grenadier, medic, engineer and soldier class types, all of whom can be hired from your base camp. Naturally, a careful balance of skill-types will be necessary for a campaign free of unnecessary frustration when out and about.

You begin the game, however, by creating a leader that must survive the entire campaign. In a way, this is 'you'. You get to customise the look, skills and starting attributes, give them a nickname, and then choose from a paltry selection of truly horrible voices. Opting for the Russian accent was initially humorous, but now I'm ready to hack my own ears off. You have been warned.

As your motley crew gain experience in the field, ability points are earned which can then be doled out on an ability tree, giving your troops enhanced skills in their chosen profession, bonuses to certain weapons or freedom from certain movement penalties. Call it role-playing if you'd like, but this character progression is pretty much invisible to the player unless you're one to study the stats carefully before each pull of the trigger. There's no real visual key to your characters' growth, because the majority of improvements come down to number crunching. Unlike Diablo, there's no cool visual reward for improving your heroes.

ONE IS THE LONELIEST NUMBER

It's got good guys, bad guys, a huge array of weapon types, distinct character classes and some very cool maps. It's even got a turn-based combat system. Yet, Silent Storm has no online multiplayer option. Not even a "I've got a network cable, here plug it in" option. Two-player games might have resulted in long protracted affairs, but hey, Star Wars Galaxies is testament to the fact that there are plenty of gamers out there just dying to waste countless hours of their lives for little to no good reason. Unhappy, Jan!



(left) A neighbourly dispute. Yesterday.



YOU SPIN ME RIGHT ROUND

AI pathfinding continues to be a bugbear for gamers everywhere, and with an unwieldy crew of up to six characters in a detailed, multi-storey environment, well... you're probably downing the Panadol tablets already. With no fixed formation settings, moving your team of agents en masse is a real mess. To be safe, you're left with no option but to move each character individually. At least when you're not in combat the game plays out in real-time, allowing you to move your rag tag bunch in and out of wherever you really want them, with no Action Point penalty.



Blow the roof off buildings. Er...

particularly devious enemy AI and the not-too-big not-too-small locations, many of which feature multi-storey buildings with a variety of entry points. Hell, in Silent Storm, if you're carrying enough grenades you don't even need to find a door...

This experimentation with tactics is made all the more engaging thanks to the impressive physics engine, deformable terrain and Silent Storm's lush graphical detail. Misfired shots will gouge permanent pock marks in cement, splinter furniture or shatter windows. Bodies hit with enough force will cartwheel backwards through doorways or slump and slide down staircases in true rag-doll fashion. Holes can even be blown through floorboards, giving you unexpected access to the floor below, or even the room above. Entire buildings can be brought to their foundations if you've been evil enough to equip your entire squad with rocket launchers. It helps lift a fairly mathematical style of tactical game into the realm of cinematic action. It's instant gratifying feedback to your instinctive decision making, and the more creative the player, the more entertaining the results.

Sure, you'll have to restart or reload (you can't save your game whilst engaged in combat on normal or higher difficulty setting) more times than you might care to if you're not willing to let any of your little buddies cark it, but it's probably the determination to be ever more efficient and lethal in the execution your moves that will keep most gamers playing. Having to restart missions only means the sandbox is ready for another kicking. Oh, and who doesn't enjoy seeing the effects of a fragmentation grenade on a warehouse full of oil barrels?

At least what it does do is make you invest in each character's welfare one shade deeper and stop to check out how they're developing. Oh how you'll learn to love Rowdy the Grenadier's unintentional grenade fumbles and gruff Scottish charm!

Creative Carnage

So you're dumped on the map, and your objectives are somewhat of a mystery. You size up any buildings, assess where enemy soldiers might be lurking and then tackle the potential dangers any way you

your enemy's weaknesses.

As you click 'End Turn' and sit back to watch the computer process your enemy's movements, there's always that uneasy feeling of helplessness. You can only sit and watch as that German soldier steps seemingly out of nowhere to riddle your heroes with a barrage of dirty Nazi bullets. If only you'd rotated your agent's 'cone of vision' towards the other side of the room and uncovered that lurking threat while you still had Action Points up your sleeve! If only you'd lobbed a

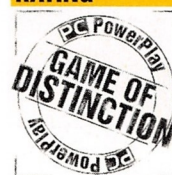
Opting for the Russian accent was initially funny, but now I'm ready to hack my own ears off

choose. This is why a good turn-based tactical game can be so delightful. Player experimentation is what makes up the meat of the experience. There's never one correct way of doing things. You can level the place with explosives, or send in your Scout and take out half the guards unnoticed. Of course, neither of these approaches may work, but maybe a blend of the two will. It all comes down to how observant you are and how well you can utilise your squad's strengths and exploit

grenade into the room before entering, just to be safe! Yes, if only. Amusingly, your mistakes are highlighted for you by the way the taunting camera automatically zooms in and focuses closely upon each combat engagement. Check this out, sucker, there were Nazis crouching in those bushes! Ha!

Making it through a mission without losing a single life in your six soldier squad is like cracking a deceptive puzzle. It's a success here thanks to some

RATING



FOR

Squad-based combat in a tried and tested tactical tradition. Nice physics too.

AGAINST

Lots of reloading of savegames. The voice acting.

OVERALL

Another one for the anally retentive gamer. Not that there's anything wrong with that.

84

Eliot Fish



1st law of robotics: learn to punch.

One Must Fall Battlegrounds

I've fallen, and I can't get up!

Developer: Diversions Entertainment ■ Publisher: Diversions Publishing ■ Distributor: Manacomm ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

SYSTEM

NEED

P3 or Athlon at
733MHz
128Mb RAM
1Gb HDD
3D card with 16Mb

WANT

Pentium or Athlon
1Ghz
256Mb RAM
3D card with 32-
128Mb

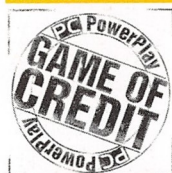
MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.omf.com

RATING



OVERALL

An interesting title
which may pique the
interest of die-hard
fighting gamers,
especially at \$49.95.
Excellent multiplayer
online modes.

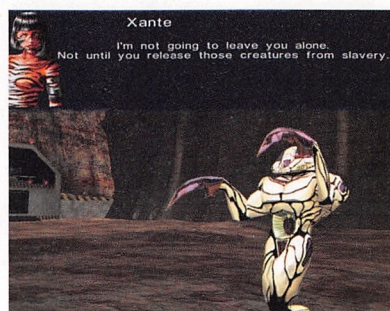
65

Oh yes, this is another "Arena" style of melee fighting game with a giant robots theme. However, these giant robots move just like nimble wind-up models, so you needn't pay much attention to the idea that they're supposed to be massive. You just take control of one of these angry R2-D2s and basically belt the resistors out of every robotic carcass you can find.

Battlegrounds is a Mortal Kombat sort of experience, with a combination of melee and ranged attacks at your disposal. It's lacking the "combos versus counter-combos" dynamic, but you do have one-use weapons spawning into the arena and limited energy for ranged and "super" combo attacks, which can be earned by using melee attacks and picking up spawning energy balls. Yes, you can also gib enemies into chunky kibbles by using big energy attacks on them when they're nearly dead. They fly up into the ceiling, explode, and then pieces rain down as if something hit the fan.

Free for all

The key feature is that you're often fighting multiple opponents. You're given the ability to run about freely, rotate on the spot and hit whomever you fancy. There are a lot of free-for-all battles, so it's



fun to run up to two players going toe to toe and smack them both with a circular attack. It's a chaotic and occasionally humorous experience. There are team-battles with rounds determined by which team is knocked out first. The multiplayer modes are rock solid, using GameSpy Arcade behind the scenes.

There are a few other subtleties too. You choose a pilot before each fight, as well as a wind-up giant robot. The pilot's abilities mesh with the robot's, creating a wide range of possible configurations, allowing you to set up to confound another player's particular style. By default Battlegrounds can only be played via keyboard, although you could

BRUISERS WANTED

If you look at the range of open-hand fighting games out there, it's quite interesting to note that there's precious few with a serious online multiplayer mode. If you think about it, this leaves those hard-core skillsters with no-one to kill, after they've whopped their flatmates 999 times. This game answers that call, with group combat modes as well.

map the keyboard controls to a decent gamepad, which we recommend. One drawback to the keyboard interface is the way the view jitters slightly when you're turning left and right, something you don't usually see in PC games anymore. It's not that the game doesn't have a good framerate, as it is silky smooth when moving forward or backward. But this jittering effect may cause the sensitive among us to develop a touch of nausea, so be warned.

Spelling mistakes

Nice graphical effects abound, although it's fairly obvious in places that this is an indie game effort. Spelling mistakes and grammatical errors occur within the menus and the backgrounds just aren't up to the standards of triple-A titles.

However, there isn't any other game quite like it – it fits a niche of "group melee fighting games" which hasn't been thoroughly explored. To be fair to them, Diversions are truly breaking new ground here, niche or not. It would be interesting to see this title make the leap to console territory, where this style of game seems more at home.

Ed Dawson



Raven Shield Athena Sword



Plagued by Bugs of Mass Destruction



Developer: Ubisoft Milan ■ Publisher: Ubisoft ■ Distributor: Ubisoft ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

I'll be the first to admit that I was caught off guard when reviewing Raven Shield. After a week or so of playing, I was infatuated with this sexy, slick, realistic shooter. The singleplayer campaign was brilliant, albeit incredibly difficult, and the limited three player co-op that I'd tried online was breathtaking. So I gave it the big thumbs up. Sadly the love affair didn't last long. Within a month or so, as more people started to play online and the net games included more people, I realised that somehow the developer had mangled the Unreal engine's netcode beyond belief, resulting in players warping around corners, bullets missing and other assorted annoyances. The cause of the campaign difficulty also became apparent - my team mate intelligence was up there with the people you see on infomercials, "carrying on like a good sort". Urgh. It also happened to have more bugs than a body in CSI. Over 70 patches later (I'm not kidding, it's bloody ridiculous) we've now got the first Raven Shield expansion pack, Athena Sword. Can it fix these issues and placate the hundreds of irate users who populate the Raven Shield forums?

The most desirable fix for the Raven Shield community is reworked netcode to fix the atrociously warpy/laggy/just-plain-naffed online play. Now, whoever was

responsible for destroying the solid Unreal netcode that Raven Shield is based upon needs to be taken out the back and introduced to Mr Heckler & Mrs Koch. Multiple times. Unfortunately they obviously rooted things up so badly that the damage is irreparable, as the problems haven't been fixed in Athena Sword. It's a tragedy to imagine how cool this game could be online if the network code worked as well as every other online shooter.

After realising that my wet dream of solid online Raven Shield play would remain in my sticky nocturnal environment rather than in front of the keyboard, it was time to fire up the

NOT ANOTHER GAME FLICK

Apparently there's a Rainbow Six film in development. Let's hope it's a little more like the book and a little less like Raven Shield.

singleplayer to see if the AI had been tweaked. It was very simple to test; give my team mates the order to open a door, behind which a terrorist stood waiting, and throw in a flashbang. I sat back and watched one of them open the door, then grimaced as they all stood right in front of it as he fumbled for his grenade. Within

Somehow the developer had mangled the Unreal engine's netcode beyond belief



seconds all three lay dead on the floor, killed by a single terrorist who then proceeded to run blindly past me. A quick bullet to his back still didn't ease the fury I felt at seeing such woeful AI in operation.

Ok, so Athena Sword hasn't fixed the two biggest problems of Raven Shield. Bummer. An almost inexcusable bummer. However, it does include some very sweet new maps in the form of an eight mission campaign set in the Mediterranean, as well as eight new multiplayer maps. Seven new weapons have also been included, but a couple of these are so crap we wonder why they bothered.

For the price Athena Sword offers a decent swag of new content, but it's a damn shame the developers didn't fix the two major problems with the original Raven Shield; the AI and the netcode.

Bennett Ring

SYSTEM

NEED

800MHz CPU
256MB RAM
32MB DX8 video card
DX8.1 sound card
1.6GB HD space

WANT

2GHz CPU
768MB RAM
GeForceFX 5700 or better
EAX compatible sound card

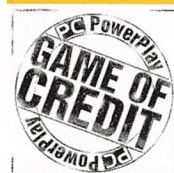
MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.hecklerkoch-usa.com
It's almost as if this game is an ad for these weapons.

RATING



OVERALL

A nice stack of new content, but the major problems with Raven Shield remain

67

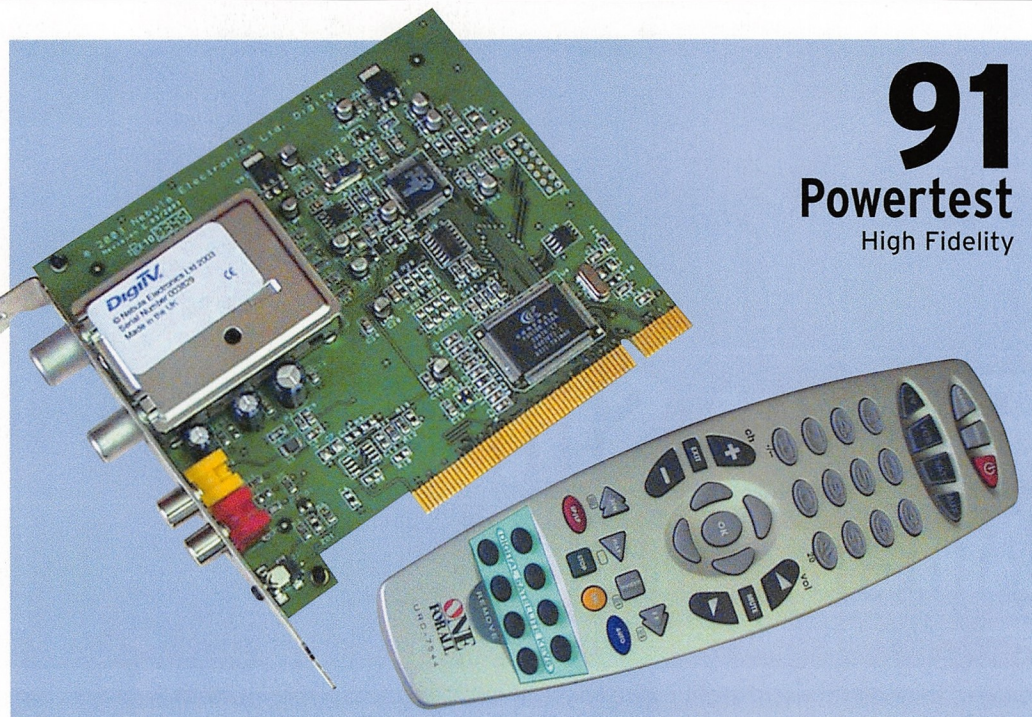


TECH IN REVIEW

It's hard to believe that eight years have passed since PCPP was launched. Looking at the pathetic graphics on offer back then, and how many chins I've developed since, it feels more like eighty. I can still remember picking up issue one of PCPP and thinking how cool it was that "serious gamers" (aka PC gamers) finally had our own Aussie representation. If somebody had of told me that 99 issues later I'd be the deputy editor of the mag, I'd have answered them with "Yeah right, and Macarena by Los Del Rio isn't going to be the top selling single of all time" before busting a few Macarena moves on their ass. But I digress.

Back then I used to get excited about running games in 640 x 480 resolution with more than 32 colours. While PC sound effects were only slightly more refined than the simple bleeps and bloops of my C64, they were more than enough to keep me happy. I couldn't get over how lifelike game AI had become after watching it shoot directly at me (yes, right at me!) and how cool playing over a 28.8 modem was. Yes, those were the primitive thoughts of a gamer stuck in the mid 90s. I look back at those games now and merely think "Damn they look crap".

Fast forward to today and, thanks to the continual evolution of technology, I'm now marvelling at the ability to play games at 1600 x 1200 resolution with anti-aliasing, anisotropic filtering and a myriad of other mysterious graphics technologies. I love my 5.1 speaker system, even though it's slowly blowing my hearing away into oblivion, and I simply couldn't live



91
PowerTest
High Fidelity

without my phat 1.5Mbps Internet connection. At times the AI in my games make me feel downright inferior.

And in eight years time, I'm going to look back at today's games and think "Damn they look crap". Well, provided we haven't nuked ourselves into oblivion during the War on Terror™.

I can't even begin to imagine how good the games are going to look in eight years time. Well, I think I can, but it's a little too scary/exciting to do so. One thing I know for sure is that I'll be there playing the games, on hardware

that's going to make my high end rig of today look like a cheap pocket calculator. As a result my girlfriend is probably going to be even more neglected than she is today.

Here's to another hundred issues of PC PowerPlay and PC gaming, and if over the coming years you happen to need a volunteer for the first direct PC to brain link designed for gaming, you can find my email right underneath this.

Bennett Ring
Deputy Editor,
bennetttr@next.com.au

- 98** Headphone shootout
- 100** Snazio Pocket Cinema
- 100** iMPIO IMP-5256 MP3 player
- 102** Billion 7500G
- 102** Seagate 200GB Barracuda
- 104** Gigabyte GeForce FX 5950 Ultra-GT

HOW WE TESTED

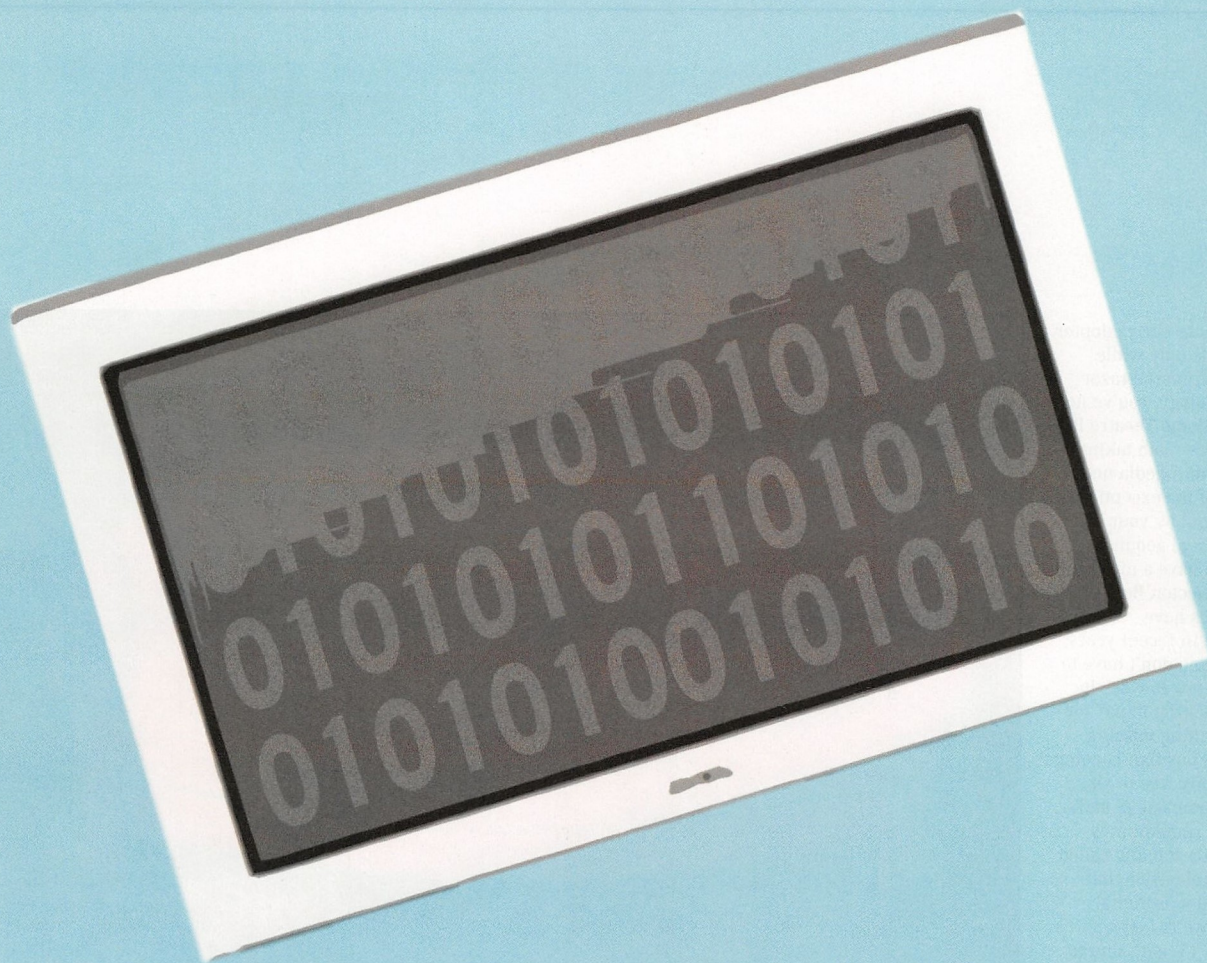
For an in-depth explanation of how we test video cards, CPUs, and motherboards head to our PowerTools section on page 104. You'll also see a list of hardware that makes up the PCPP testbenches, which are used for the testing of the majority of our hardware.

Where possible we use benchmarks based on real world games to test hardware performance; this way we know for sure which component will give you the best gaming experience. We don't love hardware for hardware's sake - it's all about using this hardware to make your entertainment

even more, well, entertaining. We also try to compare the review product with the current "best of class" piece of hardware, so at the end of the day you'll know exactly which product offers you the best bang for buck.

For a product to earn a Power Award, price be damned, we're just looking at how this product performs. If there's nothing better, that we've seen at least, it'll get the Power Award. However, if a product offers a great level of performance or features for a very reasonable price, it'll get the Value Award. Simple, really.





HIGH DEFINITION

Resident couch potato **Bennett Ring** takes a look at the future of television. Which is here now. So it's not really the future. It's more like the futupresent. Or something.



If you're one of those early adopter types, comfortable only while perched precariously on the razor sharp edge of technology, you've no doubt got a HTPC (Home Theatre PC) sitting in your lounge room taking care of all of your multimedia needs. To make the most of the exceptional picture quality offered by your little shoebox of audio visual goodness, you're likely to also have a nice high definition TV or projector. Both of these display devices have plummeted in price in recent years, to the point where you don't have to put your mother-in-law to work in the local red light district to pay for it. Yet there's something missing. That something is a box that is going to turn the low quality free to air television into the pinnacle of audio visual quality. That something is digital television (It's actually called Digital Terrestrial Television, but we'll simply refer to it as digital television because we're lazy).

Huh? Analogue TV isn't due to be phased out until 2008, so why bother considering digital television now? Is there even anything to watch on digital television yet? Surprisingly enough, digital television is here already, and there's a wealth of digital content just waiting to be soaked up by the impressionable minds of young children.

As of December 2003, a staggering 250,000 digital set top boxes and integrated digital televisions had been sold in Australia (according to the Digital Broadcasting Association). Not a bad effort considering so few people realise that digital TV has even arrived. However, this number pales into insignificance when we see how many units are predicted to sell in 2004 alone. 350,000 to be precise. Judging by these figures it's easy to see that digital broadcasting is much bigger than most realise. So what's driving sales of these under-hyped products?

Crystal Clear

First and foremost is image quality. There are two types of digital broadcasts in Australia – Standard Definition (SD) and High Definition (HD). SD is the more common of the two, with every channel broadcasting every program in SD, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. This is broadcast at a resolution of 720 pixels x 576 lines at 50Hz, interlaced (576i). Yep, that's basically DVD quality, and it looks significantly better than



He watched too much HDTV

analogue television.

If you thought SD looked great, prepare for HD to blow your eyeballs through the back of your skull. It offers an even better picture quality than SD, but things are a little more confusing with this format. There are actually three different resolutions that qualify as HD in Australia. The lowest of these is 720 x 576 at 50Hz progressive (576p) – progressive has double the

FOXTEL DIGITAL ISN'T

You've no doubt seen our mate Hugh doing his best to promote Foxtel's new digital service. But just because it's called digital, it doesn't mean that it's the same as DTT. And as it so happens, it's not. No high resolution images to see here folks, move along.

number of scan lines as interlaced, resulting in a much clearer picture. This format is used by Channel 7 for its HD broadcasts. Most AV enthusiasts are rather miffed about the fact that this resolution is accepted as HD in Australia, when in fact it's known as Enhanced Definition (ED) around the rest of the world, and they feel it's a bit of a cop out to allow broadcasters reach the quota of 20 hours of HD every week that they're forced to transmit. Next up is 1280 x 720 at 50Hz

If you thought SD looked great, prepare for HD to blow your eyeballs through the back of your skull

Progressive (720p), followed by 1440 x 1080 at 50Hz interlaced (1080i), both of which are very close together in terms of image quality. These resolutions provide the best picture for larger screens and projectors, with up to three times as many pixels as SD. You'll need a HD compatible display device to use HD, whereas SD can be used on any television.

Unfortunately for us, gorgeous HD content is very limited in Australia. Actually maybe that's a good thing, otherwise we'd never leave our homes to check out the dull real world. Each broadcaster is forced to transmit 1040 hours of HD content per annum, which works out at approximately 20 hours per week. Thankfully many new American series are now being released in HD, such as CSI and Everybody Loves Raymond, with HD slowly becoming the standard rather than the exception. Once you've seen HD it's hard to go back to SD, and analogue television looks positively primitive. As per usual, you pay for what you get. A HD/SD

compatible box can set you back upwards of \$700, while SD boxes start at around \$250.

The sound of music

But the fun doesn't stop there folks. All HD broadcasts and the majority of SD transmissions are transmitted in widescreen format (16:9), making those of us who forked out the premium for a widescreen display unit finally that glad we did so.

Most SD and HD programs also include MPEG-1 audio, which is very close to CD quality, and is definitely superior to the FM stereo that analogue uses. Your ears are in for even more of a treat as many

STAY TUNED

A new tuner card was due to hit Australia a couple of weeks after this story went to print, called the DVICO. There's a lot of hype surrounding this baby, with many predicting that it will become the digital tuner card of choice. We'll have a full review in next month's PCPP.

programs are transmitted in Dolby Pro Logic, Dolby Digital 2/0 and in rare cases Dolby 5.1, all of which supply surround sound (with 5.1 being the superior format). A recent highlight was an old Midnight Oil concert broadcast on the ABC, and after hearing the concert it's obvious that stereo sound can't last forever.

Fuzz Free

So these boxes are only for those with a high resolution display device and a surround sound setup, right? Wrong. The other major benefit of Digital TV is the purity of the image. Instead of getting the usual fuzzy ghosting that analogue TV suffers from when it's not getting a decent signal, with digital TV you either get a crystal clear DVD quality image, or you get a signal that is totally unwatchable.

CABLE NIGHTMARE

If you thought PCs were a nightmare of compatibility, just wait until you start looking around for a set top box (stb). Each box has a variety of different outputs, and these aren't always capable of outputting every available mode. They also don't always allow you to output certain modes across multiple outputs at the same time. If you feel like a bit of fun try asking your friendly local retailer about this, and watch them melt down into a puddle of confusion. Your best bet is to the www.dba.org.au forums, which are packed full of DTT-knowledgeable folk, all of whom are ready and willing to help you get connected.

However, getting digital reception can be a little tricky. To check if your area is covered, head to www.dba.org.au and use the coverage tool to see if you're in luck. But even then there can be hurdles that need to be overcome. If you're living in apartments with a shared antenna, chances are that it's not compatible with digital television. I had this very problem in my apartment, even though the building is only around four years old. At first I was rather confused about why I could only receive Channel 7's SD and HD broadcasts, but a quick inquiry to my friendly neighbourhood AV geek confirmed that my building's communal antenna system simply was quite simply crapola.

Luckily a cheap set of rabbit ears fixed the problem, and many users of digital television have found this to be a suitable solution. Unfortunately this isn't always the case; sometimes it's necessary to fit a digital-ready antenna, but these are quite affordable compared to the cost of your other AV components.

Digital TV also offers other services such as datacasting, which is similar to viewing a Net page, but not as interactive, as well as a few extra channels. Most of which are crap. A nice touch are the electronic program guides for each station, showing you what's coming up.

A better way to do it

Instead of buying one of these set top boxes, you can install a digital television tuner card into your HTPC. These are a fraction of the cost of set top boxes, and usually have time shift and PVR features

CABLE NIGHTMARE PART 2

Many set top boxes use SCART outputs, as they're originally designed for the European market, where SCART is very popular. Unfortunately Australian AV gear tends to use component inputs, so you'll need to buy a SCART to component or S-video cable, as most of the units we reviewed didn't include them. Keep in mind that many of these cords are directional.

due to your PC's hard drive. Time who and PV what?

Time shifting allows you to pause a program whenever you like, and to then unpause it when you're ready to resume viewing. It does this by recording the broadcast once you hit pause; when you unpause it the recording is played back while the HTPC continues to record the live stream. It's a very funky little feature that blends live television with the convenience of DVDs. PVR simply stands for Personal Video Recorder, which is basically a high tech VCR that uses your hard drive instead of clumsy plastic cassettes. The beauty of PVRs is that they record digitally, so there is no image quality loss, giving you beautiful DVD quality.

My life as a couch potato

After discovering how big Digital TV is, and how it's going to grow at a phenomenal rate over the next year, we simply had to take a look at what's on the market right now. I have to say that kicking back on the couch watching HDTV is one of the most mentally taxing, energy sapping tasks I've ever had to be

paid for. It's right up there with watching DVDs. How I managed to get through so many units is quite beyond me, and is testimony to the power of caffeine.

To test each of the units we used the Sanyo PLV-Z2 projector, as it is capable of displaying all of the various image formats, and the large size of the image made image quality differences easy to pick. Plus it's just crazy cool. A few members of the AV community voiced concerns about the fact that this projector converts the digital TV signal from 50Hz to 60Hz, but we felt this wasn't too much of an issue, with the usual motion judder that can result from this being almost unnoticeable. Channel 9's HDTV demonstration stream was used to test HD performance. When testing each unit we considered the following areas:

- Ease of installation
- Features
- Ease of use
- Picture quality and ability to handle weaker signal strengths
- Sound quality
- Pricing

To test the ability to handle various signal strengths we ran the box with the antenna in one of two set positions, one of which delivered excellent signal strength while the other was quite weak.

There are a few things to consider when entering the realm of Digital TV, but it's really not that complicated once you've done a little research. And once you've experienced the leap in sound and image quality that digital television presents over analogue TV, there's no way you'll go back.

DGTEC DG-5000i

• Price: \$899 • Format: HD & SD • Contact: DGTEC www.dg-tec.com.au • Product URL: www.dg-tec.com.au

Judging by the ports on the rear, this box is identical to the Toshiba HD-S23, but with a slightly different front panel and GUI. Which is no bad thing.

Installation is very simple, although it does take a while to do the full auto scan. Capable of both HD and SD, the 5000i has a stack of outputs, but it's still not quite as comprehensive as some of the leading contenders. For those who flunked out of primary school, the onscreen channel guide is one of the best we've seen, being incredibly

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna, serial, composite
- Output: composite, S-video, component, S/PDIF optical, RF

easy to use. Picture quality is impeccable, and it handles lower signal strengths well. For all intents and purposes the 5000i performed identically to the Toshiba box. In a word, excellent. Unfortunately, it happens to be \$100 more expensive...



DGTEC DH-2000A

• Price: \$699 • Format: HD & SD • Contact: DGTEC www.dg-tec.com.au • Product URL: www.dg-tec.com.au

What's going on here? The 2000A is two hundred bucks cheaper than the 5000i, still does HD and SD, yet has considerably more outputs? As a result of these it's easier to hook up a video to the composite out if you're also using composite out for your TV, and it's also got coax S/PDIF.

The major difference is the output mode switch at the rear, which you'll need to manually toggle to change between the various modes. The other difference is its ability to handle a weaker signal,

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna, serial
- Output: S-video, composite (TV), composite (VCR), component, RGB, S/PDIF optical & coax

dropping out more frequently than its more expensive brother. When the signal is nice and strong there are no problems with the image quality. If you're in an area with great signal strength, and don't mind adjusting the switch, this is a very nicely priced HD box.



DGTEC DH-2000B

• Price: \$299 • Format: SD • Contact: DGTEC www.dg-tec.com.au • Product URL: www.dg-tec.com.au

This is the first of the review units to only display SD, with no HD compatibility. Setting it up proved to be simple, just like every other box. Hit autoscans, watch it pick up all of the channels and away you go. Even a Mac user could do it.

Unfortunately the performance of the unit isn't as pleasing as installing it. It's especially bad at operating with a weaker signal, and even when being fed a stronger signal the picture quality is definitely lacking. These problems are somewhat offset by the excellent

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: Antenna, serial
- Output: SCART (TV), SCART (VCR), antenna loop, composite (TV), composite (VCR), S-video, S/PDIF optical.

menu system, with one of the best parental locking systems, ensuring the kiddies won't be able to see *Zombies with Axes II*. Unfortunately this doesn't make up for the poor reception offered by this box.



DT-700

• Price: \$349 • Format: SD • Contact: Matchmaster www.matchmaster.com.au • Product URL: www.mediastar.com.au

The lack of composite out really hurts this stb. S-video isn't bad but it doesn't come close to the image quality offered by composite if you're using this box on a high definition display device. Having said that, if you're using this on a run of the mill television set the S-video output should be fine.

Setting up this box is simple, although the scanning process seems to take an exceptionally long time. It's not hard to design an

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna, serial
- Output: S-video, S/PDIF coax, composite, RF

intuitive interface, so we're quite disappointed that the program guide on this box is so bad. The DT-700 copes well with lower strength signals, which is possibly it's only highlight.

Not a bad box, but for the price there are better ones on offer.



Hauppauge DEC 2000

• Price: \$399 • Format: SD • Contact: New Magic www.newmagic.com.au • Product URL: www.hauppauge.com

The best feature about this box is the USB connector that links it to your PC, allowing you to watch SD television on your monitor. While that's handy, the real beauty is the ability to then use your PC as a PVR. Sure, it only does SD, but it's a very cheap way to set up your own PVR. Well, it would be if it worked.

Unfortunately plugging this device into the HTPC somehow mutated our PC into a machine whose sole purpose in life was to crash. We were informed to delete HD channels from the channel list

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna
- Output: SCART, antenna loop, USB, stereo minijack

as these caused crashes, and we did so, but this did not explain why the time shifting and PVR functions are so unstable.

It's a nice idea, but this box is let down by very buggy performance. And even if it did work, the price is very high for a SD only tuner box when compared to the tuner cards.



Nebula DigitTV USB with 4 in 1 universal remote

• Price: \$300 • Format: HD & SD • Contact: HyperReality www.hyperreality.com.au • Product URL: www.nebula-electronics.com

This unassuming little beige box is simply a must have item for anybody with a HTPC. Large claims indeed, but we couldn't come to any other conclusion after using it.

Installation is as basic as it can get – whack the software onto your PC, plug the box into a USB 2.0 port and then install the drivers off the CD. Upon firing up the software it's hard not gawp at the gorgeous interface. Due to the fact that video is outputted via the PC's DVI output, image quality is nothing less than stunning, being easily the best in

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna
- Output: antenna loop, USB

the entire roundup. Time shifting and PVR functions worked perfectly, although the latest version of the software does seem a little unstable. No doubt this will be fixed in an upcoming version.

If your HTPC chassis is too crowded to squeeze a tuner card inside, the DigitTV USB comes highly recommended.



4/5

Nebula DigiTV PCI with 4 in 1 universal remote

• Price: \$280 • Format: HD & SD • Contact: HyperReality www.hyperreality.com.au • Product URL: www.nebula-electronics.com

This product is identical to the USB version, except it fits inside your PC rather than being an external unit. It's also \$20 cheaper. So let's rave on about some more of the features that both of these units share, shall we?

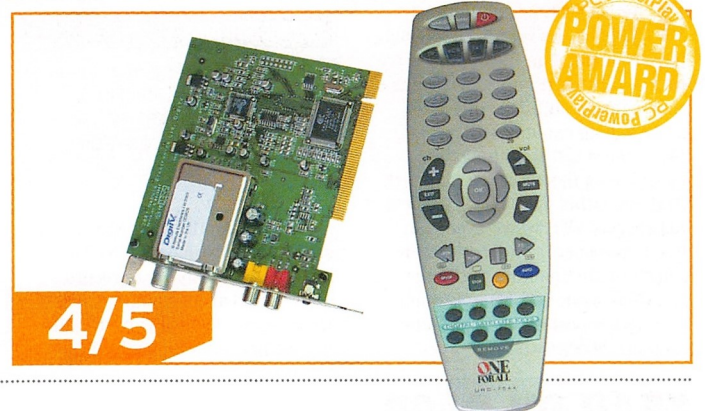
Time shifting worked absolutely perfectly on both of these units – simply hit the pause button, and unpause the show at our convenience. And unlike the DEC2000 we didn't have to say a prayer to our chosen demigod in the hopes that the machine wouldn't

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna
- Output: antenna loop

crash. The PVR function is equally impressive, working spectacularly, without any jitters or corruption displayed during playback.

There is one minor problem with the PCI version though – it needs a higher signal strength than the USB version to maintain a clear picture. This won't be an issue for those with a decent antenna and/or reception.



4/5

Panasonic QTR2140

• Price: \$989 • Format: HD & SD • Contact: Panasonic www.panasonic.com.au • Product URL: www.panasonic.com.au

As one of the priciest stbs in the roundup, we were expecting big things from the QTR2140. Unfortunately it wasn't to be...

The first disappointment is the need to manually switch the output mode via dip switches on the rear of the unit, which is quite inconvenient. The interface isn't the greatest we've seen either, with a relatively poor onscreen channel guide. Thankfully the GUI isn't all bad, as the channel information bar provides all of the relevant information, laid out in an easy to

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna, serial
- Output: RF, S-video, component, RGB, S/PDIF optical & coax, VGA

read format. Sadly it's one of the poorer performers in the entire roundup when dealing with weaker signals. Considering these shortcomings it's difficult to see why this box costs so much, and as a result we have to point you towards the Toshiba box if you want a high end set top box.



2.5/5

Samsung DTB-D700F

• Price: \$499 • Format: SD • Contact: Samsung www.samsung.com.au • Product URL: www.samsung.com.au

It's surprising to see that Samsung is the only company creative enough to insert a DVD drive into their stb. Considering you can now pick up a DVD drive for close to the cost of a pack of chips, we're unsure why nobody else has gotten around to doing it.

Unfortunately this drive is unable to read DVD+R and DVD-RW disks, which might be a problem for some. Other than the DVD drive the D700F is a fairly stock standard SD stb. Set up is as blindingly easy as the majority of the boxes, and we can't

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna, serial, RF
- Output: antenna loop, S/PDIF optical, composite, SCART (TV), SCART (VCR), RF

make any complaints about the intuitive interface. At only \$500 (and up to \$100 cheaper if you shop around), this stb offers exceptional value for money, which is a nice change from other convergent devices.



3.5/5

Strong SRT-5300

• Price: \$349 • Format: SD • Contact: Strong Technologies www.strong-technologies.com • Product URL: www.strong-technologies.com

If you want to run component from this box you'll need to buy a SCART to component adaptor – many of the boxes in the roundup included SCART output, even though this connection doesn't seem to be anywhere near as popular as component for newer display devices.

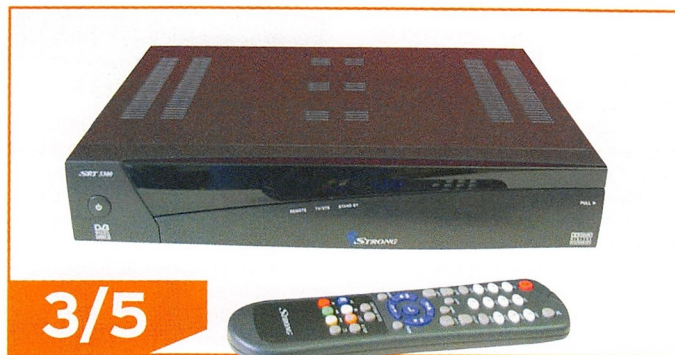
Unfortunately this device's ability to handle a weak signal isn't spectacular, with lots of dropping out. The GUI is also quite disappointing, being nowhere near as idiot proof as some of the more

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna, RF loop, serial
- Output: antenna loop, RF, SCART (TV), SCART (VCR), composite, S-video, S/PDIF optical and coax.

intuitive examples.

For the price we can't really complain, but you'll need to make sure you're able to get a decent signal before splashing out on the Strong SRT-5300.



Strong SRT-5390

• Price: \$699 • Format: SD • Contact: Strong Technologies www.strong-technologies.com • Product URL: www.strong-technologies.com

The SRT 5390 is an interesting take on the set top box. Strong have implanted an 80GB hard drive into it, turning it into a PVR with time shifting abilities. This goes some way to explaining the high price, but it's still quite pricey considering there's no HD support. And while this is by far the easiest to program VCR we've ever seen due to the user friendly onscreen interface, the inability to change channels while recording is a major pain in the posterior region. Time shift also works well.

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna, RF loop, serial
- Output: antenna loop, RF, SCART (TV), SCART (VCR), composite, S-video, S/PDIF optical and coax.

Other than the hard drive, this stb is basically identical to the 5300, but having the ability to record between 20 and 40 hours worth of DVD quality footage is pretty nifty. Just be prepared to pay for it.



TEAC DV-B400

• Price: \$299 • Format: SD • Contact: Teac www.teac.com.au • Product URL: www.teac.com.au

Looking at how tiny this little box is, it's surprising to see that so many of the other stbs are so big. A unique feature is the composite ports, which double as component ports depending on what you've set up as the output.

Setup is a breeze as per usual, and the onscreen interface is very usable. The unit's ability to deal with a weaker signal isn't quite up to scratch with some of the better units, but it's by no means shocking. When provided with a good signal picture quality was excellent. It does get a

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna, serial
- Output: antenna loop, SCART, composite/component, S/PDIF optical

little hot under the hood after extended use, but so do most stbs.

The DV-B400 is a very solid little unit for the price, and is recommend for those on a tight budget. Shop around and you'll probably find it for even cheaper than the RRP.



Thomson DTI 1500HD

• Price: \$899 • Format: HD & SD • Contact: Shriro www.shriro.com.au • Product URL: www.thomson.net

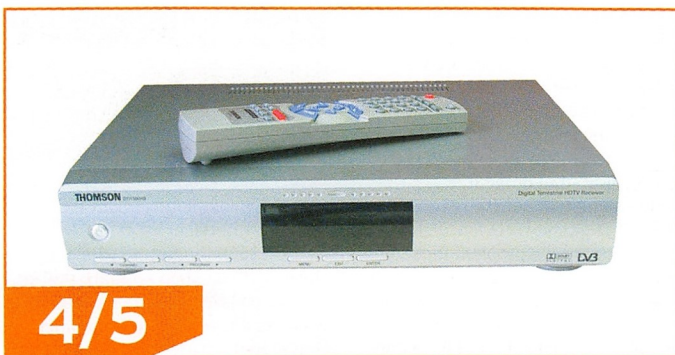
This stb has one of the most comprehensive ranges of output options; not only are there a stack of different outputs, they're also capable of displaying one of the widest ranges of outputs of all of the stbs. Setup time is minimal due to the rapid fire auto scan, taking a fraction of the length of the others.

For the price you'd expect excellent picture quality, and this box won't disappoint. It also handles weaker signals exceptionally well. Possibly the

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna, serial
- Output: antenna loop, VGA, S/PDIF optical and coax, component (SD), component (HD), composite, S-Video

only complaint that we can make about this box are the output mode switches on the rear of the case, as well as the high price. Overall a very high quality unit that should cater to even the most demanding AV freak.



Thomson DTR6000AU

• Price: \$699 • Format: SD • Contact: Shriro www.shriro.com.au • Product URL: www.thomson.net

This is another device which fuses a hard drive into the set top box, and it does it well, as the PVR and timeshift functions work perfectly. However, just like another of the units that includes a hard drive, we can't really see the justification for the higher price. This is especially true of the 6000AU, as it only includes a 40GB hard drive, half that of the other two competing hard drive enabled unit.

Other than these features, this is a solid unit, although it does struggle a little with weaker signals,

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna, RF (TV), serial
- Output: SCART (TV), SCART (VCR), composite, RF, antenna loop, S/PDIF coax

and shares the limitation of the 6000AU in that you can't change channels when recording. Unfortunately we can't see why you'd buy it when the 5390 is the same price, yet includes double the storage capacity.



Topfield TF5000PVRt

• Price: \$1,099 • Format: SD • Contact: Topfield www.topfield-australia.com.au • Product URL: www.topfield-australia.com.au

Topfield has packed two tuners into this unit, allowing for true Picture in Picture support, unlike the boxes that claim to allow it but really only let you preview the same channel. An 80GB hard drive is included and thanks to the two tuners, you can watch a different channel while recording, which makes it much more usable than the other units with hard drives. You can also record two channels at once. Once you've filled up your hard drive, the USB port allows you to copy the recordings off the unit

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna x 2, RF, serial
- Output: antenna loop x 2, composite, s-video, SCART (TV), SCART (VCR), USB, RF, S/PDIF optical

and on to your computer. The ability to handle weaker signal strengths isn't quite as good as some of the better performers. All of these cool features come at a cost, but if you don't need HD support, this is easily the best set top box of the lot.



TOSHIBA HD-S23

• Price: \$799 • Format: HD & SD • Contact: Castel www.castel.com.au • Product URL: www.toshiba.com.au

There's nothing better than a good GUI to keep you happy. And happy is what you'll be with the HD-S23, as it's got the best interface of the lot, making channel selection a quick and easy process.

Image quality was superb, and it's quite happy to work with a weaker signal. A seemingly nice touch is the Picture in Picture mode, until you realise that you can only watch channels within the same channel group. For example, you could be watching Channel 9 HD as the main picture, with Channel 9 SD

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: serial, antenna
- Output: component, composite, S-video, S/PDIF optical

as the small picture, but you can't do Channel 9 as the large, and Channel 7 as the smaller. Which makes it basically useless.

Apart from this minor complaint the HD-S23 is an excellent stb, being for all intents and purposes identical to the DGTEC DG-5000i, but \$100 cheaper.



VisionPlus VisionDTV

• Price: \$199 • Format: HD & SD • Contact: Lako Pacific www.lakopacific.com • Product URL: www.twinhan.com

The software for this tuner card is nothing short of abysmal. Apart from having a severe lack of features and one of the ugliest interfaces known to man, major stability issues did their best to make us despise this card right from the word go.

Thankfully the makers of this card released the SDK, and there are now several pieces of software available that make it a much more attractive option, with a lower CPU utilisation and better image than the Nebula. You can find a wealth of information

SPECIFICATIONS

- Input: antenna
- Output: n/a

about these at <http://robdvd.radfiles.net/>. The only problem with this approach is that it takes a whole lot more work to find out which applications are most appropriate, and they still tend to fall behind the Nebula software. But if you're willing to do a little research, you can save yourself \$100 and get a nice solid HTPC solution.



Headphones Shootout

Headphones are a must for many gamers: basically anyone who lives at home with parents or recalcitrant house-mates, as well as those who attend LAN parties. Inquisitive neighbours also get in the way as they seek the deafening source of exploding zombies. Fact is, you gotta have a good set of headphones at some point and they have to suit your taste in music as

well as faithfully reproduce game sounds. The features to look for in headphones are comfort, impedance and air pressure. Comfort is almost paramount – I'll take comfortable sets over better sounding but uncomfortable pairs. Low impedance sets generally perform well from unamplified sources. Higher impedance goes with quality amplifiers. High

volumes are good but are your ear bones being blown out your ass from high air pressure? Do you run everything out of a full-height, rack cabinet? Need a long cable? One more thing to note is sound leaking into or out of the headphones.

For our tests of the following sets, subjective listening occurred over a period of two weeks, with a pair of shockers used in between

to temper the excitement of new technology. How they get sound moving around, under, over and behind you from headphones these days is quite frankly beyond me.

Stuart Calvin

DISTRIBUTOR: All products supplied by Headphonic at www.headphones.com.au

Ultrasone S-Logic HFI-500 DJ1

• Price: \$249 • URL: www.ultrasone.de

The HFI-500 DJ1 is marketed as the headphone for Disc Jockeys. The DJ1 is easy to drive from an unamplified source, features a coiled cable and a foldable design with swivel cups. All Ultrasone headphones feature reduced electro-magnetic radiation. Reduced magnetic emissions are fine but if you're irreparably deaf, from a brief life as a DJ, does brain cancer matter? This model is a closed, circum-aural headphone with a frequency range of 10Hz to 22,000Hz. Frequency range is

nothing unless you understand how bass and treble are implemented and reproduced in various music compositions. It has an outstanding impedance of 64 Ohms and is suitable for big amplifiers. It sounded damn fine out of my Audigy. Absolutely no noise leakage in or out of these headphones. Perfect for listening in noisy environments or when you don't want to disturb those around you. They feature S-LOGIC natural surround sound which provides a true sounding three-dimensional

environment. The surround feature doesn't need artificial echo nor digital processing or cross over run time delay like Digital Signal Processing. These are great sounding headphones, except I wanted to rip them off after just 20 minutes. I sat still for an hour and they were still uncomfortable. Don't people test these things?! I learned to just give them a quick poke with a finger to take the weight momentarily and they were good for another 20 minutes.



Beyerdynamic DT234 PRO

• Price: \$169 • URL: <http://beyerdynamic.de>

The DT234 Pro is Beyerdynamic's entry level headset. It features the same design and sound characteristics as the DT231 with a boom mic added, making it ideal for voice communications, online gaming or voice recognition. It's a closed headphone with supra-aural sound coupling for the ear. On music, trebles were a little fuzzy and percussion instruments could've been better. Piano was soft and indistinct and it tended to rattle. Electronic music (organ/electronic keyboard) was 'buzzy' at mid to

high frequencies. Hard rock and heavy metal was A-OK, thank you very much. There is little leakage out of the headphone set, but plenty in. I could hear E.R. from the TV as Feuerwerk 1999 played with my senses. I listened to some deep, resonant Bach (Tocatta in D Minor) but the TV came through despite high sound levels in the cups. On gaming, wifey could just hear UT2K3 during TV dialogue. String and wind instruments were outstanding: the violins in Maonaloa were just great. The nominal impedance is 32 Ohms

meaning that unamplified sound is no problem. My Audigy ate it up fine. These headphones soak up positional audio like a last meal. Eerie. That's what late model headphones are. They're frickin' good. The headpiece relies on an elastic band under a rigid skull piece. Very, very comfortable. I could leave these on all day rather than want to rip them off after one album.



Beyerdynamic DTX800

• Price: \$169 • URL: <http://beyerdynamic.de>

The DTX800 is the midrange model in Beyer's Trend Line headphone range. They have a lightweight, semi-circumaural design with plush earpads and swivelling earcups. The Neodymium magnet circuit is a superb medium allowing for low weight products. With an impedance of 32 Ohms they are suitable for direct output from soundcards. I found this set hard to fault on anything I played. Although a midrange model they

are bloody good all-round and particularly good for vocal and instrumental. I think these sounded best in classical music and 6-ch DVD movie. Wind and string instruments sounded better through this set and the bass was faithfully reproduced. Bass rolled on and off as expected with no 'woofing' or muddiness. Everything just sounded 'rich' with lots of presence. Positional audio game sounds were all there. Game sound can be demanding although the

developers try not to make it that way. Gaming was fun – there was just a solid feel to the sound. My Onkyo amplifier had no issues. I experienced no leakage into the set at all and I got no complaints about nuking small African and European nations. This set provided the least air pressure on my ears and I found I could go heavier on volume than with the other two sets. I was able to sit for nearly three hours before wanting to adjust the ear pieces which is pretty damn good.



The HFI-500 DJ1 produces great sound but they're uncomfortable. With the DT234 Pro I only had to adjust them every hour or so; I want a pair; good for gamers. The DTX800 was the pick of the bunch for being excellent across a range of music genre and game sound.

ABIT

Advanced Durability



Automatic On-the-Fly OC

FLASH MENU

1 Click BIOS Update



Total System Monitoring



Reliable Onboard Service

A Better System In 20 Seconds

U-GURU

Is it GURU?

KV8-MAX3



VIA K8T800

- Support AMD Socket 754 Athlon 64 CPU
- VIA K8T800 chipset support 800 MHz FSB
- 3 DIMM support DDR 266/333/400 (ECC) memory
- 4 x SATA 150 support RAID 0/1/0+1
- 6 Channel Audio, Optical S/P DIF In/Out
- Support IEEE 1394, USB 2.0, Gigabit Lan, AGP 8X
- ABIT OTES™ Cooling System
- ABIT uGuru™ Technology

U-GURU

AN7

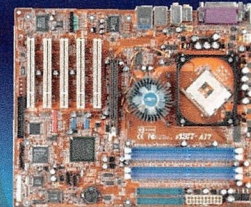


nFORCE2 Ultra 400

- Supports AMD Athlon XP/ Athlon /Duron CPU
- nVidia nForce2 Ultra 400 chipset with MCP-T
- Support Socket A, 266/333/400 MHz FSB
- 3 DIMM support Dual Channel DDR 400 memory
- 2-channel SATA support 150 Raid 0/1
- 6 Channel Audio, Optical S/P DIF In/Out
- Support IEEE 1394, USB 2.0, 10/100 Lan, AGP 8X
- ABIT uGuru™ Technology

U-GURU

A17



Intel® 865PE CHIPSET

- Supports Intel® Pentium® 4 / Celeron CPU
- Support Intel® Hyper-Threading Technology
- Intel® 865PE / ICH5R chipset support 400/533/800 MHz FSB
- 4 DIMM support Dual Channel DDR 400 memory
- 2-channel SATA support 150 Raid 0/1
- 6 Channel Audio, Optical S/P DIF In/Out, Audio Jack Sensing
- Support IEEE 1394, USB 2.0, 10/100 Lan, AGP 8X
- ABIT uGuru™ Technology

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www.ABIT.com.tw



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Fax: 61-2-9735 5656
http://www.altech.com.au

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Building 3, 13-15 Brough St
Springvale VIC 3171
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Fax: 61-3-9558 5091
E-mail: sales-mel@altech.com.au

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South Brisbane QLD 4101
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Fax: 61-7-3017 2020
E-mail: sales-bne@altech.com.au

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61-8-9201-2768

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www.scorpiontec.com.au
www.cpl.net.au
www.gamedude.com.au
www.austin.net.au

i-MPIA IMP-5256 Digital Audio Player

• Price: \$379 • Distributor: www.efx.com.au • URL: www.efx.com.au/products/impia5000.asp



If I carried my lead-balled Jenny-Craig approved mp3 player around more, my soft, mushy bod, would be trim and taut in no time. There's definitely something wrong when you work up a sweat, just from changing your playlist.

Well that will not be a problem with this player, At 35g, I'm yet to see a lower weighted player this side of the Sea of Tranquillity.

Being such a lightweight, it's sure to sound average, right? Surprisingly, this unit sounds more than adequate. It's crisp, with good bass, reasonable volume, and has pre-defined EQ options for personalised preferences. For those needing some quantitative rating, it probably sits in the top 25 percentile of this market.

It comes in three flavours, with the 256MB review version providing space for at least 80 songs. You can also chew up some of that abundant memory with voice recordings. You could record 34 hours of your

favourite professor's rantings, or alternatively, every syllable that Carmack has ever muttered. Interviews and lectures aside, shopping lists and more mundane usage isn't out of the question. The fact that you can configure the recording for different environments makes it even more useful.

The interface is semi-graphical in nature, and controllable via a mini-joystick. The usual 'joystick moved in my pocket' problem is eliminated thanks to a hold/lock switch. You've gotta be quick with the interface though as it only takes a slight hesitation and the menu turns off, returning you to the default view.

This is one of the few units that can encode audio streams to mp3

on the fly via an input cable, but the quality of the recordings are mediocre, a surprise considering the quality of the playback engine.

You also get an in-built radio, 6-8 hours of battery life depending on what you're doing with it, and dual headphone support as seen on previous i-MPIA models. An occasionally lit technicoloured screen is tres cool and tops it all off.

One minor disappointing aspect is the slightly flimsy feel to the

device, a side effect of the low weight. But as long as you stay away from the Weight-Watchers dance clubs, it'll probably survive.

Jason Brown

SPECIFICATIONS

- Size: 93 x 39.6 x 16mm
- Weight: 35gm
- Memory: 256 (128/512 versions available)
- Battery: 1 x AAA 1.5V

PCPP Score

If light and easy doesn't do it for you, the goodness in your ears will.

91



SnaZio Pocket Cinema SZ1000

• Price: \$595 • Distributor: www.bytezone.com.au • URL: www.snazio.com

We all love a good flick. The something.1 surround sound, the fight to keep 3 rows of seats to yourself, playing dodge ball with flying Jaffas aimed directly at the back of your head. So it's not surprising that the idea of carrying a theatre in your pocket, and hence avoiding the 'charms' of the real cinema, could have some appeal.

Well this product almost escapes the cutting room floor. It doesn't actually let you watch movies from your pocket, exactly. You won't be rolling Jaffas down the aisle on the train, plane, or at church. What you can do is hook it up to a TV or projector via the provided cables. Then you'll be watching all the movies, Stargate episodes, and jpeg holiday slideshows you can squeeze onto its 30 gig hard disk.

You can port your files in from a Compact flash card, or similar cards if you have an adaptor. More likely though, you'll let your media files (excluding .avi and divx) scream down the USB2.0 pipe from

your PC to the unit's hard disk. You'll have to end up using the USB eventually though as it's the only way to delete files when you're done with them.

What you can do outside the couch potato patch, is listen to mp3 and wma files, but the quality isn't awe-inspiring. It's a bit on the soggy side, and with no equalisation controls, you're limited in this regard. Mind you, it's fairly heavy for such a compact device, so you're unlikely to consider any mobile musicification with it anyway.

As far as it goes, it's a good product, but it's just a tad limited considering the cost. Of course you

could use it as a portable USB hard disk, for avoiding the hefty surcharge on motel movie rentals, or for running snazzy client presentations. The included credit card sized remote control is great in these situations. It also comes with an international power adaptor and PAL/NTSC support, which makes it quite travel happy.

Some decent video editing tools, such as the unique Muvee AutoProducer are included. This automatic editing tool does an Edward Scissorhands in the cutting room impersonation, leaving you free to pop the popcorn.

Jason Brown

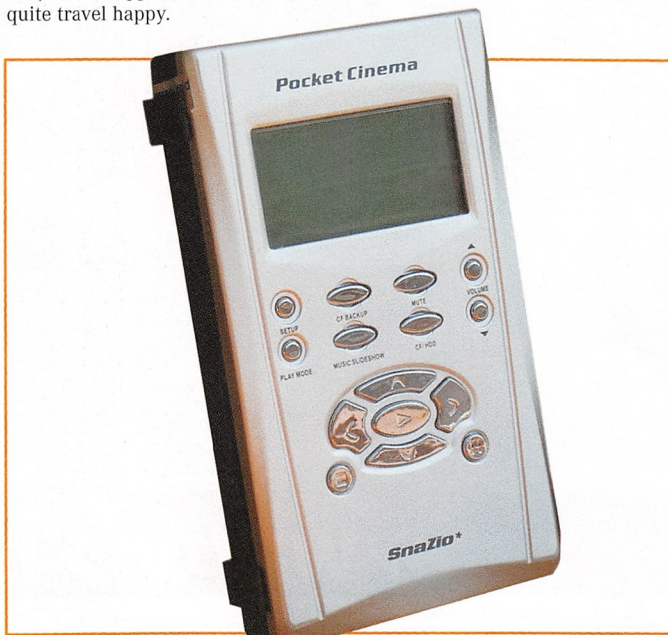
SPECIFICATIONS

- File formats: Mpeg1/2/4, mp3, wma, jpeg
- Size: 13.9 x 8 x 2.5cm
- Output: S-Video, Composite, Stereo audio
- Input: USB 2.0, Compact Flash, others via adaptor (not included)

PCPP Score

It may seem a bit like an expensive mp3 player without headphones, but it caters well to a niche market.

75



It all connects:
Your home's digital centerpiece

XpC at home.



Shuttle creates, others follow

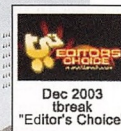
- 400/533/800 MHz FSB Intel® Pentium® 4 / Celeron® CPUs
- ATI Radeon™ 9100 IGP
- Intel® Hyper-Threading technology
- Dual-channel DDR400 memory (2GB max)
- Serial ATA w/ RAID, 8X AGP
- FireWire® 400, USB 2.0, 6-channel audio

Silent X technology

- Integrated Cooling Engine (ICE) technology
- 250W power supply unit
- Active venting



Shuttle's Silent X technology delivers intelligently-engineered ergonomics for "super quiet, super cool" operation.



Seagate 200GB Barracuda 7200.7 Plus

• Price: \$220 • Distributor: <http://www.seagate.com/cda/reseller/distributors> • URL: www.seagate.com

Hand's up those who've run out of room on their 120GB drive? Games, games, games, music, video, pr0n, and a few school or uni assignments. Seagate are a major manufacturer of hard drives and the ST3200822A is their latest biggy. For a street price of \$240 you can have 200 Gigabytes of real storage ecstasy. In 1995, I paid \$245 for a 2.1GB drive and I thought that was heaven! This model has a humungous 8MB buffer to suit streaming audio visual enthusiasts. With the Seagate ST3200822A we're talking 100GB per platter, the highest areal density on the market from 3.5" platters. Just two platters and four heads makes for respectable seek and latency timings.

To support drives larger than 137GB, WinXP users will need 48-bit LBA support for ATAPI available in SP1. The figure of 200 'manufacturer gigabytes' (GiB) or 200 billion bits, works out to be 186.265 'real' Gigabytes. Format it

with NTFS and you have about 179GB of useful space. This is still a parallel ATA100 disk and you're not going to see any ATA133 drives from Seagate because they're pushing serial ATA with a bunch of other manufacturers and developers. But the same capacity disk is available with a serial ATA connection. The real world difference between ATA100 and ATA133 is at best minimal, then again it's a huge jump from ATA66. I'd plump for the serial model if you've got native S-ATA on your motherboard. Nevertheless, if you're stuck with parallel IDE ports then it's an alternative. The noise of hard drives is generally low (except for

screaming SCSIs) and Seagate claims the quietest on the market at 2-3bels. This drive also includes is the 3D Defense System for protection against handling damage and data loss, and the actual case is ruggedised against vibration. I whisked large files from various disks onto the Seagate and then off it again without a hiccup. I threw

150GB of files and folders at it and it just merrily hummed away while I surfed and ripped some songs. I'm a fan of Seagate and I'd be happy with their latest monster, but at a cheaper price.

Stuart Calvin

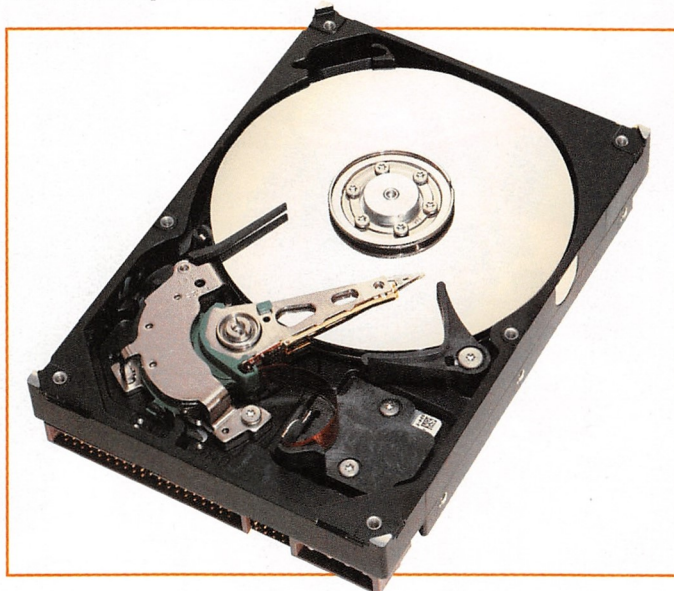
SPECIFICATIONS

- 7,200 rpm ATA100 parallel interface
- 32-58MB/s sustained transfer rate
- 8MB buffer
- 8.5ms seek, 4.16ms seek times
- 3 year warranty.

PCPP Score

Although Seagate has a solid brand image, there is a cheaper 200GB competitor on the street and price is almighty for hard drives.

80



Billion 7500G 802.11g 4 port ADSL Modem/router

• Price: \$369 • Distributor: PC Range www.pcrange.biz • URL: [Billion www.billion.com.au](http://www.billion.com.au)

Companies such as Billion are a godsend to cheapskates like me – without them we'd be paying \$1,999 for a 56k modem and wireless routers would be the domain of people who get around in Lear jets. In the last year or so this company has released a number of networking products that are substantially cheaper than the big name networking brands, yet have offered performance and features equal to (if not better than) its competition. The 7500G is the latest offering from Billion, and is even more attractive to the networked gamer than the company's value packed offerings of the past.

Anyone who shares their broadband connection with several other users in the same house will know what a pain in the butt it can be while gaming. You're flying along on a 35ms ping, then your little sister jumps on to look at www.shesays.com, and before you know it your ping is hitting

200ms+. An enjoyable solution to this problem is to lock said sister into the basement, but there's an easier, less sadistic answer. QoS, which stands for quality of service, is a very simple to use feature that will remove the LSLP (Little Sister Large Ping) problem for good. This allows you to prioritise network traffic by one of two ways, IP or data type. Using this, you can ensure that your gaming data is given the right of way over everything else, leaving you with a rock solid ping. We tested this feature on the 7500G and it worked perfectly. Surprisingly, the other user of the network didn't notice any degradation of their net browsing performance at all.

As if this handy feature wasn't

attractive enough, the fact that this speedy 802.11g (54Mbps) router with built in ADSL modem sells for around the price that other companies sell their 802.11b routers for makes it even better value. The interface isn't quite as newbie friendly as some of the more basic routers we've seen, but this complaint is trivial when compared to this product's strong points.

Billion has done it once again with the 7500G, providing a feature rich, high performance product that is more than deserving of your hard earned cash. And your little sister will probably appreciate it even more than you do.

Bennett Ring

SPECIFICATIONS

- 802.11g Wireless AP with WPA Support
- High Performance VPN Connection
- DoS Prevention and SPI

PCPP Score

Blazing performance, gamer friendly QoS feature and excellent value for money – what more could you ask for?

95



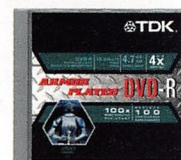
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Gigabyte GeForce FX 5950 Ultra-GT

• Price: \$800 • Distributor: TechBuy www.techbuy.com.au • URL: tw.giga-byte.com/VGA/Products/Products_GV-N595U-GT.htm#

There seems to be a growing trend at PCPP as of late, whereby every second issue we're reviewing a GeForceFX 5950. Back in #95 we brought you our 9800XT vs. 5950 slugfest, while #97 saw our two-way 5950 shootout and finally, this issue is home to (surprise surprise) yet another glamorous 5950 review. Thus, you can probably imagine how thrilled I was when yet another one landed on my doorstep! Oh, but this is no ordinary 5950, Bennett explained. This is a "GT"! "You know, sports cars, half-naked chicks, checkered flags - I have a really good feeling about this one! Half-naked chicks!"

Sports cars, half-naked chicks, checkered flags - I have a really good feeling about this one! Half-naked chicks!

Did I mention, half-naked chicks?"

Thankfully, this 5950 does possess some unique features. Although they're not exactly revolutionary, such innovation is vital, not only because, clock for clock, ATI's 9800XT is faster, but also due to the fact that there are a plethora of other manufacturers all fighting for the same market share.

The first feature worth noting is the increase in core clock speed, which has been bumped up from the default of 475MHz to a handy 520MHz. Additionally, the card also comes bundled with some nice full-version software, including PowerDVD 5, Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness, Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield and Arx Fatalis, all of which should allow you to harness the full power of your shiny new graphics card right out of the box. Connectivity wise, the Ultra-GT boasts the now standard-fare DVI and VGA ports (with a DVI-to-VGA adapter for dual-monitor support) and VIVO (Video-In/Video-Out), which can be exploited using the included break-out box. Quality-wise, utilising the Phillips SAA7108AE VIVO chip, picture quality and resolution were both predictably top-notch. Thus, other than the increase in clock speed and VIVO, this card is identical to the Gigabyte GV-N595U reviewed

in issue #97. Hardly a justified reason for the "GT" moniker. Furthermore, with the N595U overclocking to a handy 535/520MHz anyway, the merits of the Ultra-GT at stock settings become even more obscure.

As expected, the Gigabyte card was able to slightly outperform MSI's offering due to its increased core clock speed, however, this is certainly nothing to write home about. What's more, when the MSI card is overclocked to similar speeds, the difference between the two cards is negligible.

So, if it isn't more powerful than competing 5950 cards and doesn't

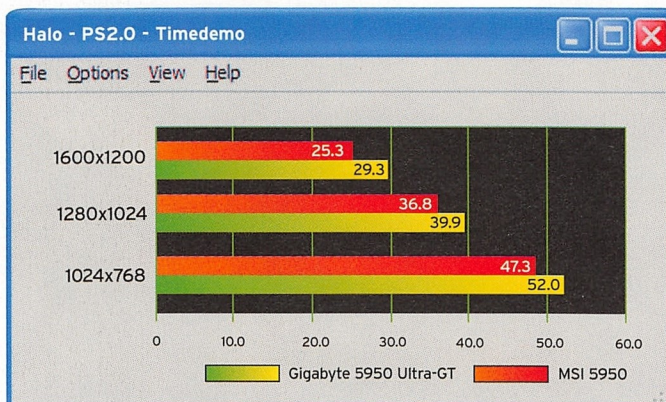
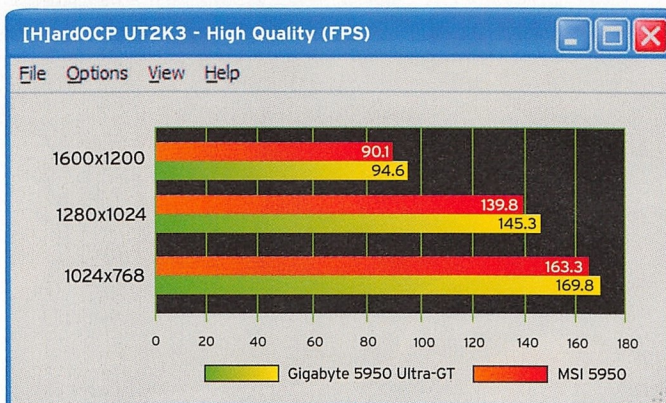
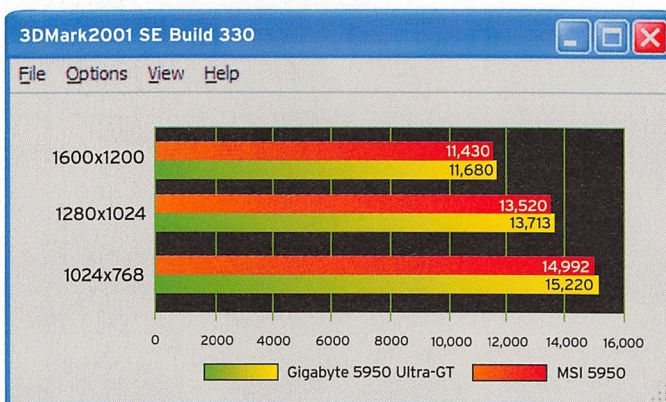
boast any unique features, why the hell has the product been released at all, you ask? Contrary to what you may be inclined to believe at this point, the advantages provided by the Ultra-GT are not purely psychological.

Using PowerTools, we were able to overclock the card to a whopping 560/535MHz (core/mem.), which is well above anything we've achieved with a 5950 in the past. This is a huge saving grace for Gigabyte, as, for hardcore overclockers, this fact alone is enough to warrant a purchase.

In order to achieve such high speeds, Gigabyte has had to make a number of modifications to the reference GeForceFX 5950 design. Firstly, the heatsink/fan unit adopted is slightly more powerful, resulting in a distinct, penetrating "whirring" sound that is nonetheless bearable for those that are questing for maximum performance. Additionally, Gigabyte has decided to use Hynix 2ns memory chips, which was clearly an informed decision as these have yielded speeds that are 15MHz above the GV-N595U.

The bottom line is, disregarding ATI's offerings, if you're a hardcore overclocker and don't mind spending a premium in order to receive maximum overclocking results, you won't find much better than Gigabyte's 5950 Ultra-GT. However, if you don't have an NVIDIA fetish and would like similar performance at an even lower price, the Radeon 9800XT is still a better buy.

Asher Moses



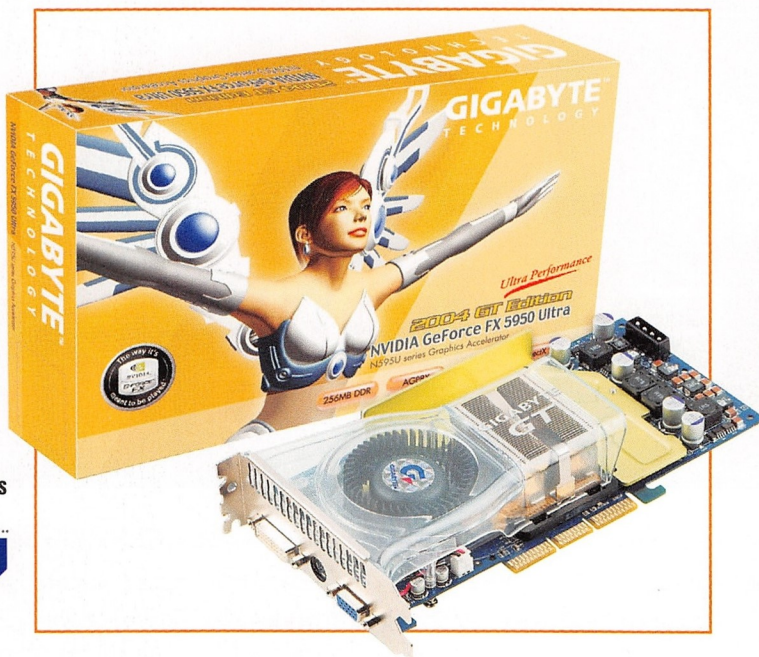
SPECIFICATIONS

- 520/475MHz Core/Mem
- VIVO Support
- DVI
- 256MB DDR
- Three full-version games

PCPP Score

Overclockers will love this product, but the R9800XT is still faster.

80





ThermalTt Coolall Your Life

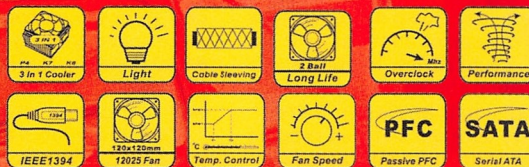


Coolall Your Life

Purepower

POLO12 410W

SILENT and POWERFUL



- 3-in-1 CPU cooler application for P4, K7, K8 80x80x25mm adjustable fan speed, 1300 rpm ~ 3000 rpm
- 2 adjustable manual fan speed controls in the front and rear side of the case:
 - 1) In Front: 5.25" drive bay for 2 channel controller
 - 2) In Rear: PCI slot controller
- Intelligent cable slewing
- 120x120x25mm PSU blue LED light fan Two Ball bearing adjustable fan speed, 1300 rpm ~ 2800 rpm
- 120x120x25mm Case Fan adjustable fan speed, 1300 rpm ~ 3000 rpm
- Dual Serial ATA (Advanced Technology Attachment) power connector
- 9 Molex connectors (4 pin)



120mm adjustable case fan

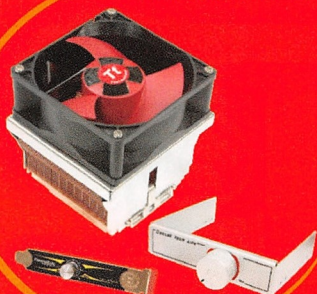


Full copper base

3-in-1 cooler with adjustable fan speed for P4/K7/K8



VOLCANO 12



HARDCANO 12



XASER CASE



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Website: www.thermalTt.com.au

E-mail: sales@thermalTt.com.au



ThermalTt

Bennett Ring PowerTools

While it would make our jobs a heck of a lot easier if we could review hardware based on the shininess of the packaging it arrives in, we're pretty sure our beloved readers are a little more interested in how the hardware actually performs. Which is why we have the PC PowerPlay PowerTools - batteries not included.

If you're anything like us, you probably don't give a rat's arse if Word will open three seconds faster on the new Pentium 64,

or if you can compress a zip file more speedily using DDR6-8000 memory. Nope, this is PowerPlay, so it's all about how well your games will perform.

Our PowerTools are broken into two categories, videocard tests and CPU/motherboard/memory tests, and you'll notice that most of these are based on real world game engines. We spoke to Intel, AMD, NVIDIA and ATI about which games to use to benchmark our hardware, and

after tossing out their biased recommendations settled on the following applications for the majority of our tests.

Actually, we used the benchmarks that competing companies both agreed upon, to help make sure our tests can't be accused of favouring one flavour of hardware over another.

Of course, every now and then a unique piece of hardware will arrive that can't be tested properly using these

applications, and in these circumstances we'll use the most appropriate benchmarking software.

We also use test benches (a fancy way of saying a PC outside of a case, waiting to electrocute unsuspecting hardware noobs), standardised hardware platforms that ensure our benchmark results can be compared to each other month after month. Check out the box below to see what components we use in our test benches.

CPU Tests

3D Mark03 CPU test

Nobody can deny that this CPU test is a nice way to give processors a thorough workout. And hey, it's easy to use and free - 'nuff said.

Jedi Knight 2

We couldn't ignore a benchmark that includes lightsabres. We run this test at low resolution (640x480), with texture details lowered, and geometry details maxed out.

[H]ardOCP Unreal Tournament 2003 test 2.1

We run the CPU test of this benchmark at low resolution, and it's one of the finest indicators of CPU performance available.

Comanche 4

It sucked as a game, but as a CPU/motherboard/memory benchmark this is a beauty. We run at 640x480 resolution to make sure it's the CPU that's carrying the load.

Videocard tests Aquamark 3

There ain't nothing sexier than pixel

shaders baby, and this benchmark uses a wad of DX9 shaders. You can almost hear your video card squeal in pain when running this test.

3DMark2001 SE v330

An excellent DirectX 8.1 benchmark, we're still waiting for games to look this bloody good. Unlike its newer sibling, 2001SE doesn't have a reputation for being incredibly biased. We run this test at a variety of resolutions.

Halo

Considering this was a port from the NVIDIA powered Xbox, we were quite surprised to see ATI give this DX9 benchmark the thumbs up. Which is fine by us, as this is one game that will seriously test even the fastest of video cards.

[H]ardOCP Unreal Tournament 2003 test

Crank up the resolution and set the benchmark to High Quality mode, and you've got a test that will bring both ATI and NVIDIA products to their knees. This is also the test that we use for anisotropic filtering and anti-aliasing tests.

TEST BENCHES

Intel Test Bench (x2) Intel Pentium 4 2.6C

HIS RADEON 9700 PRO
www.akatech.com.au
Corsair 2 x 256MB XMS3200LL DDR400
www.altech.com.au
Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 160GB ATA100 Hard Drive
www.seagate.com
ABIT IS7 865PE motherboard
www.altech.com.au
TOPOWER 470W PSU
www.auspcmarket.com.au
Mitsubishi Diamond View 2115e 21" monitor
www.mitsubishi.com.au
Microsoft multimedia keyboard and optical mouse
www.microsoft.com.au
Windows XP Professional
www.microsoft.com.au

AMD Test Bench (x1) AMD Athlon XP 2600+

HIS RADEON 9700 PRO
www.akatech.com.au
Corsair 2 x 256MB XMS3200LL DDR400
www.altech.com.au
Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 160GB ATA100 Hard Drive
www.seagate.com
ABIT NF7-S
www.altech.com.au
TOPOWER 470W PSU
www.auspcmarket.com.au
Mitsubishi Mitsubishi Diamond View 2115e 21" monitor
www.mitsubishi.com
Microsoft multimedia keyboard and optical mouse
www.microsoft.com.au
Windows XP Professional
www.microsoft.com.au

Image Quality testing:

We also use a Sony G520 21" CRT monitor for the image quality testing of video cards.



www.akatech.com.au



www.corsairmicro.com



www.auspcmarket.com.au



www.intel.com



www.abit.com.tw



www.amd.com



www.seagate.com



www.hightech.com.hk



www.altech.com.au



www.sony.com.au



www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au

Stuart Calvin

Decrypt

Descriptions of CPU technology and functionality are generally littered with some mind-boggling techno-speak. Here's a little of it Decrypted.

3DNow!: AMD CPU instruction set that enhance floating point intensive, 3D graphics and multimedia performance. Enhanced 3DNow! adds 24 new instructions - 19 to improve integer math calculations.

AMD: Advanced Micro Devices are a major player in the manufacture of x86 CPUs.

AMD Athlon64: The new chip from AMD that implements 64-bit instructions. Runs at a much slower frequency than Intel chips, but due to a faster architecture still performs better than Intel CPUs that are clocked at higher speeds.

Athlon XP: AMD's mainstream desktop CPU.

Cache: A block of high speed memory where data is copied when it is retrieved from the RAM. This storage of key instructions enables a performance improvement in the processor. More cache is good for performance, but costly to implement.

Celeron: This Intel processor is a budget derivative of the Pentium processor and is designed to provide practical performance for everyday computing.

Chip: The actual integrated circuitry implemented on the CPU.

Core: the single silicon chip which contains the integrated circuitry to implement a CPU. It also contains the L1 and L2 cache.

CPU: Central Processing Unit. The 'brains' of your computer. Sometimes referred to as a "chip", more often as the processor or microprocessor.

Data Prefetch Logic

functionality: Anticipates the data needed by an application and pre-loads it into the Cache, further increasing processor and application performance.

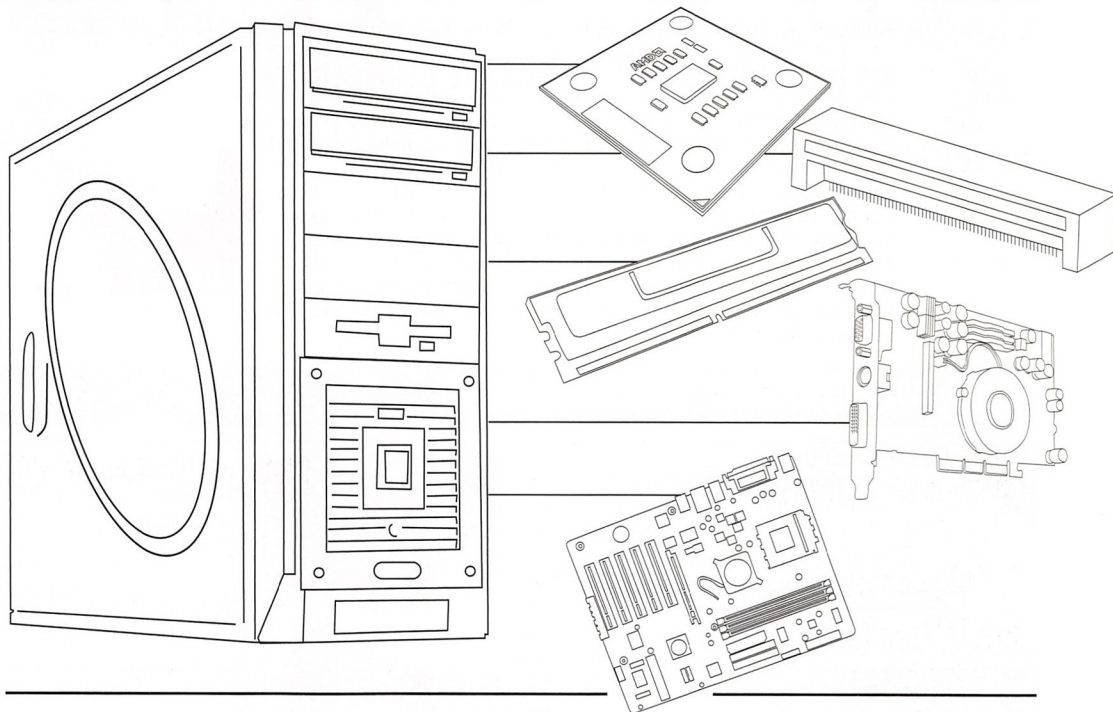
Die: A single piece of silicon used to manufacture the Core.

Duron: This processor is a budget derivative of the Athlon and is designed to provide practical performance for everyday computing for business and home users.

Extreme Edition: A Pentium 4 processor with an additional 2MB of L3 cache. It's Intel's answer to the Athlon 64FX processor.

FSB: The Front Side Bus is the connection between the CPU and motherboard. Measured in MHz and soon, in GHz (w00t).

HT Technology: HyperThreading is a process that allows an Intel



Pentium 4 CPU to be viewed by the operating system as two processors. It allows one processor to utilize unused parts of the CPU to work on two separate operations at the same time rather than one at a time, provided they don't need to both use the same elements of the CPU.

Hz: An abbreviation for Hertz, the international unit for measuring frequency, equivalent to the older unit of cycles per second. One Megahertz (MHz) is one million Hertz. One Gigahertz (GHz) is one billion Hertz.

Intel: THE major player in the manufacture of x86 CPUs.

L1 Cache: The Level 1 data cache contains 64 KB of memory storage. Two simultaneous 64-bit operations (load, store or combination) are supported. The L1 instruction cache also contains 64KB of storage.

L2 Cache: The Level 2 cache contains both instruction and data stream information.

L3 Cache: The Level 3 cache allows the processor to access frequently used data even more quickly. The data sets in some applications are getting so large they can't be fully contained by a 256KB L2 cache, putting the CPU at risk of performance-killing cache misses.

LGA 775: Land Grid Array 775-contact pin-less. The new motherboard socket format for Intel's forthcoming Tejas CPU. A direct socket loading technique, similar to a waffle iron, traps the LGA package inside a "socket body stiffener". Yep, bizarre.

MMX: Matrix Maths Extensions technology is designed to accelerate

multimedia and communications applications.

NetBurst micro-architecture:

Intel's CPU marketing term which covers a number of features including Hyper Pipelined Technology, Execution Trace Cache and Rapid Execution Engine. It also delivers a number of enhanced features, including Advanced Transfer Cache, Advanced Dynamic Execution, Enhanced Floating Point and Multimedia Unit, and Streaming SIMD Extensions 2. Google is your friend.

Packaging: The AMD Athlon XP processor employs OPGA, or Organic Pin Grid Array packaging technology. The substrate used to make this packaging is fibreglass, similar to the material found in printed circuit boards. The Pentium 4 processor employs FC-PGA2 or Flip Chip-Pin Grid Array 2.

Pentium 4: Intel's mainstream desktop CPU.

Pipe: A component to which instructions can be issued for calculation. Any given pipe usually executes only one class of instructions.

Pipeline depth: Late model processors consider several instructions simultaneously. A pipeline depth of 20 means that about 20 instructions per pipe are in flight at the one time. Generally, the longer the pipeline, the slower the performance per clock cycle.

Process: the generation of the manufacturing used to make the chip. Described in terms of the width of the narrowest copper wire interconnect like the "0.13 micron process".

QuantiSpeed: QuantiSpeed is a marketing term that encompasses the AMD Athlon XP processor's core architectural features.

QuantiSpeed incorporates: Nine-issue, fully pipelined, superscalar micro-architecture; Superscalar, fully pipelined floating point unit (FPU); hardware data prefetch; exclusive & speculative Translation Look-aside Buffers (TLB). Google is your friend.

SIMD: Single Instruction Multiple Data technology.

Socket A: The current AMD CPU socket format for the Athlon XP.

Socket 423: The old Pentium 4 socket format with 423 pins. Tops out at 2.0GHz.

Socket 478: The latest Pentium 4 socket format with 478 pins. Currently running to 3.2GHz.

Socket 754: The current AMD CPU socket format for the Athlon64, soon to be superseded by Socket 939.

SSE (Streaming SIMD

Extensions): Streaming SIMD Extensions are 70 instructions that reduce the overall number of instructions required to execute a particular program task. As a result, they can boost performance by accelerating a broad range of applications. NetBurst micro-architecture adds 144 new SSE instructions, which are known as SSE2.

x86: The x86 architecture was invented in 1978 though the 32-bit version which is now standard first appeared in the 80386 released in October 1985. Today's CPUs are still based on this architecture, even the Athlon64 (which uses x86-64).

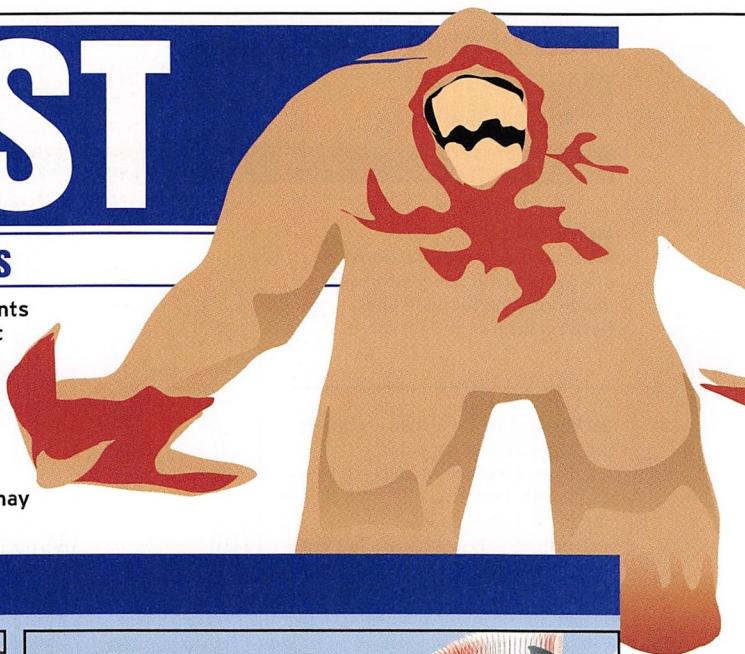
THE BEAST



In association with Altech Computers

Welcome to PCPP's Beast page, where we give you the blueprints for three very different PCs, each catering to a different wallet thickness and/or level of technical knowledge.

For those with extra phat, well padded money holders, look no further than the Beast. You'll be hard pressed to find a faster machine, but you'll pay through the nose for the privilege. Then there's the Mutant, for those who don't mind a bit of tinkering and overclocking. It offers the best balance between price and performance. Finally we have the Beastie. Cheap it may be, but slow it certainly is not.



CPU, MEMORY AND MOTHERBOARD

AMD Athlon FX-51 CPU

Goodbye Intel, hello AMD. The FX-51 is bloody expensive, but the fact that it's the fastest gaming processor around meant we had no choice but to fit out The Beast with this speed demon.

\$1258 www.amd.com



Asus SK8N

Yep, it's one incredibly expensive motherboard, but that's what you have to put up with when you want the best of the best. At least you'll know that it's of the highest quality.

\$412 www.asus.com.tw



1GB Corsair TWINX-3200LL ECC Registered

The FX-51 demands only the finest in registered memory, and a Gig of the stuff for a mere \$560 is quite simply a bargain. It's Corsair as well, so it must be pretty good, right?

\$560 www.corsairmemory.com



Zalman 7000A-Cu

The Beast is so chunky, so wild and untameable that you need a real man's cooler stuck on the top of your mighty CPU. Zalman delivers, offering a chunk of metal that performs well and isn't too screamingly loud.

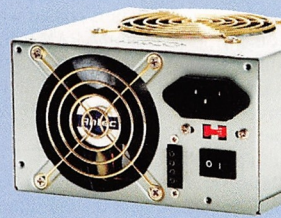
\$79 www.zalman.co.kr



Antec TruePower 550W

With 550 watts of blistering power you can plug in as many crazy case fans, cooling systems and front-mounted LCD panels as you like and still enjoy smooth, reliable gaming.

\$200 www.antec-inc.com

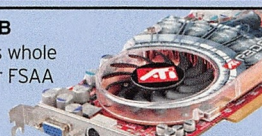


VIDEO, AUDIO AND CONNECTIVITY

XpertVision RADEON 9800XT PRO 256MB

With more onboard memory than some people's whole PC, the latest in the RADEON family will get your FSAA performance up and keep it up.

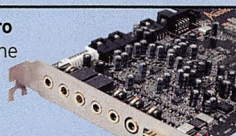
\$770 www.xpertvision.com.tw



Creative Soundblaster Audigy 2 ZS Platinum Pro

The most powerful consumer-level soundcard on the market. Support for every sound format, including Dolby 6.1 surround.

\$499 australia.creative.com



Logitech Z680

Let your soundcard handle all the decoding and plug these Power Award winning speakers into the ports on the back. You've never heard PC speakers like these.

\$699 www.logitech.com



STORAGE AND OPTICAL

Sony DRU510A DVD +/- R/RW

Almost but not quite cheap enough for mere mortals to own, this Sony drive will burn DVDs and CDs at 4X and 24X respectively - tasty!

\$299 www.sony.com.au



Samsung 816BRPS 16x DVD-ROM

It's straight up and down, it's cheap, it's fast, it works well and you need it to copy - sorry, back up - DVDs using your nifty writer.

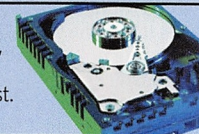
\$62 www.samsung.com.au



2x Western Digital 74GB Raptor WD740D RAID 0

Sure, they're not the biggest hard drives on the planet, but they're arguably the fastest. And with a name like Raptor, it's obvious they were created just for our Beast.

\$860 www.westerndigital.com



DISPLAY, INPUT AND COSMETICS

17" Samsung 172x

It's might only be a 17" monitor, but it has the viewable area of a 19" CRT, at a fraction of the size. Blurring is a thing of the past due to the 12ms response time.

\$900 www.samsung.com.au



Antec P160

This beast of a case is perfect for a beast of a PC. A couple of temperature gauges on the front make it perfect for letting you know when your system is about to explode.

\$250 www.antec-inc.com



MS Wireless Optical Elite Desktop Pack

Keyboards and mice don't get much snazzier than this delectable combo.

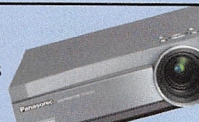
\$210 www.microsoft.com.au



Panasonic PT-AE500E

Who needs a piddly monitor when this baby will throw a high resolution (1280 x 720) image 2.5m wide across the closest wall? The ultimate gaming experience.

\$3,899 www.panasonic.com.au



BEAST VALUE:

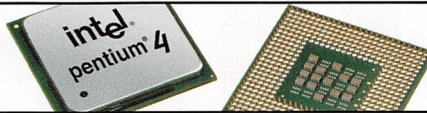
\$10957

THE MUTANT

Thanks to the popularity of overclocking and tweaking, we've included this machine to show you exactly what you can get away with for not much outlay. Tweaked to within an inch of its life, this is the machine we DO own, versus the Beast, which is the machine we'd like to be able to AFFORD to own.

Intel P4 2.6GHz "C" at 3.3GHz

Truly the most overclockable of all modern CPUs, the 2.6C can be run at a staggering 700MHz over its stock speed. With the standard Intel HSF. Now that's value. \$300 www.intel.com



Abit AI7

An 865PE based mobo from Abit, the AI7 has a very handy feature in that you can overclock your system directly from the Windows desktop. Which means you needn't delve into the confusing BIOS options ever again. \$195 www.abit.com.tw



MS Wireless Optical Elite Desktop Pack

Sure, this combo isn't exactly cheap, but you can't skimp on the interface between you and your box of love. And it's all wireless, making it perfect to use from the comfort of your couch. \$257 www.microsoft.com.au



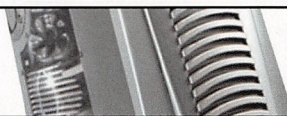
Antec TrueControl 550W

What could be groovier than a PSU that comes with a 5.25" front plate with dials and knobs for controlling fan speed plastered all over it? Nothing, that's what. \$210 www.antec-inc.com



Antec PlusView 1000AMG

An excellent pre-modded case, with more than enough fan mounts to keep your oc'd system nice and chillin'. And with this machine, you'll definitely make the most of the side window. \$171 www.antec-inc.com



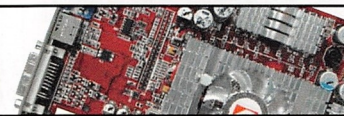
1GB Corsair TWINX-3200C2

Damn memory is getting cheap. Who'd have thought a year ago that you could now pick up a gig of ridiculously fast DDR-RAM for a mere \$377? Not us, that's for sure. \$377 www.corsairmemory.com



XpertVision RADEON 9800XT

Amusingly, the video card is the single most expensive component of the Mutant. It's hard to believe that you can now get a RADEON 9800XT for a mere \$770, considering just how blazingly fast this video card is. \$770 www.xpervision.com.tw



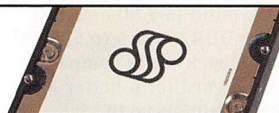
Zalman VGA Heatpipe Cooler 80C-HP

Bolt this mighty thing to your video card, attach the included fan, and who knows what insane core speeds you can achieve? \$68 www.zalman.co.kr



120GB Seagate IDE

The first upgrade HDD I ever bought was 6GB and cost \$447. So this is pretty damn cheap. Only standard IDE, but at this price we can't complain. \$146 www.seagate.com



Creative SB Audigy

Lacks a few of the features found on the Audigy 2, but only the ones that don't really have much effect on gaming. There's a lot of soundcard here for not much cost. \$129 australia.creative.com



Creative Inspire 6.1 6600

They're so cheap they're good enough for the Mutant. No decoder, no difficult optical inputs, just ordinary wires plugging in to a set of extraordinary speakers. \$249 australia.creative.com



Samsung 816BPRS 16x DVD-ROM

Same as the Beast, this drive is fast, dependable and has a slightly funkier facade than most of the beige monstrosities currently available. \$62 www.samsung.com.au



Samsung 252BRNS 52x24x52 CD-RW

Wow, these things sure got cheap didn't they? Burn CDs in hardly any time at all thanks to 52x writing. Backup all your digital LAN shots for posterity. Pose nude... no wait, don't. \$59 www.samsung.com.au



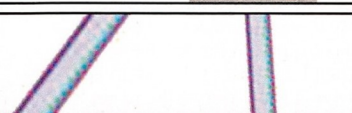
19" Samsung 995 Dynafat

Cheaper than the video card but still a lot of sleek, flat monitor. Nineteen inches is pretty much the minimum for decent gaming, and we can't wait until a 16ms LCD this big costs this much. \$545 www.samsung.com.au



4x Antec Internal Illuminate

Pep up the Mutant with a few light sticks. Stick 'em on the monitor, in the case, wherever you like. USB powered and respond to sound - clap on, clap off! Other cosmetic additions to the Creature are limited only by your imagination. \$176 www.antec-inc.com



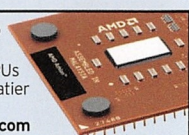
MUTANT VALUE: \$3665

the beastie

The cheapest but worthiest PC of all, the Beastie is for all of us who need gaming, the web and to generally have fun without worrying about overclocking or our bank account.

AMD -Athon XP 2500+ Barton

The cheapest CPUs keep getting meatier and meatier. \$146 www.amd.com



Abit NF7

nForce2 is good and this implementation of it is even better. www.abit.com.tw \$132



Antec Lanboy

Includes a 350W power supply, window and carry strap. \$180 www.antec-inc.com



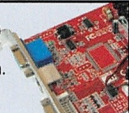
512MB Corsair PC-3200

A budget PC with half a gig of RAM. All praise the open market. \$220 www.corsairmemory.com



GeCube RADEON 9800

Yes, a 9800 in a budget system. Holy shit batman. \$445 Available from www.emagen.com.au



80GB Seagate IDE

Plenty of room for not much cash. Dependable and reliable. \$110 www.seagate.com



Creative Inspire 2500 2.1

Plug 'em in to the nForce2's onboard sound and it's MP3-tastic! \$119 australia.creative.com



Samsung 816BPRS 16x DVD-ROM

Good enough for all the PCs on this page, swift and reliable. \$62 www.samsung.com.au



Samsung 252BRNS 52x24x52 CD-RW

Cheap, fast, reliable, what more could you want from a CD-RW? \$59 www.samsung.com.au



17" Samsung SyncMaster 753S

To think 17" monitors were once worth \$800. I love the technology of the future. \$226 www.samsung.com.au



MS Internet Value Pack

Not content with owning your OS world, MS are now ruling the I/O roost. \$64 www.kmepc.com

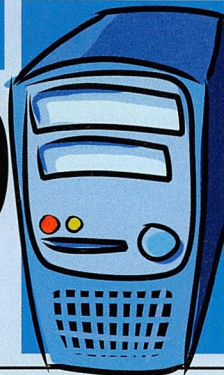


beastie value: \$1763

So, you want one of these three fine beasts? Luckily, all of these components are available at **Altech Computers** www.altech.com.au 02 9735 5655



SETUP



WRITE TO SETUP AT:

Setup
PC Powerplay
78 Renwick St
Redfern
NSW 2016

setup@pcpowerplay.com.au

PLEASE PREDICT THE FUTURE FOR ME



Q Hi, I was wondering if you could help with selecting a new vid card. Currently, I have an MX440 on an ASUS P4B-M mobo. I need something that will run HalfLife 2, Prince of Persia and the likes. Will I need to upgrade my mobo? And if so what would you recommend?

Steve

A The P4B533-M is not a bad motherboard but you are limited to 4x AGP, DDR 266 support and a 533MHz FSB. Presumably you're not running the 8x MX440 and wish for DX9 support? Without DX9

support you won't be able to enjoy the full range of new video technologies. To move to an 800MHz FSB, some DDR333/400 RAM and 8x AGP 3.0 will cost some bucks. You could think about a simple upgrade of the fastest 533MHz P4 around (a 2.80 or 3.06), more DDR266 (up to 512MB) and a backwards compatible 8x vid card (or a better 4x) that'll run on your motherboard until you upgrade later - howzat? And as HL2 hasn't been released yet, we can't predict which video cards will run it well.

OPEN UP DAMMIT!

Q My computer can't open any .exe files, it keeps saying only part of the read process memory or write process is complete. When I go to msconfig or any control panel apps there's the same message but rundll32.exe on top of it.

05los

A The Open and/or Open\Command key(s) in the HKEY_CLASSES_ROOT\Exefile\Shell subkeys of the registry have been corrupted, modified, or are missing. The correct data for the (Default) value should be "%1" %*. The SirCam virus was good for this malicious change to the registry. Given you can't open up regedit.exe to fix this, click Start/Run and type in this address <http://www.annoyances.org/exec/show/article07-102> follow the instructions and away you go.

Don't forget to fix the cause - a virus - or it may happen again. More information is shown at Microsoft Knowledgebase articles 172223, 311446, 555067, 250931 and 310585.

PC ABUSE

Q I come home to my month old upgraded PC that keeps on crashing on me and I completely screwed it up. I turn it on and it crashed while attempting to log in. I was so mad that I turned it on and off (instantly) by pressing the power switch. After a long wait I open up My Computer folder to go to My Documents on the 20GB disk (D:\). Then I discovered that I had no D drive. I tried everything to get it working again. I even unscrewed my computer to see if the cords were tight enough and they were. I restarted it three times to get my

lost data back but it didn't. Is my disk completely screwed or am I completely stupid?

Sam Prebble

A Yep, this was completely stupid. Don't ever lose your patience with your baby - chances are you've screwed the HD. Hopefully a reformat will fix the problem. Next!



BUDGET BANG

Q Hi. I was looking through www.razorprices.com and after reading several SetUp letters in editions #96 and #97 of your magazine, I was wondering what the best card is to get. You stated that the 9600XT 256MB is only \$255 at Zone Computing, but then there is also a GeForce FX5700 256MB for \$258 at the same site. I'm just wondering why ATI is suddenly so much better than nVIDIA, and will it really make that much of a difference to my gaming?

Michael Kamar

A The simple answer is that ATI's 'anti-jaggy' technology is far superior to that of nVIDIA. The Anisotropic Filtering and Anti-Aliasing technologies are known as Accuview by nVIDIA and SMOOTHVISION by ATI. (Michael later did himself a favour and purchased a u-beaut ATI card). However, prices on the GeForceFX 5900 have plummeted, and are now becoming worthy budget cards.

STEP ON UP

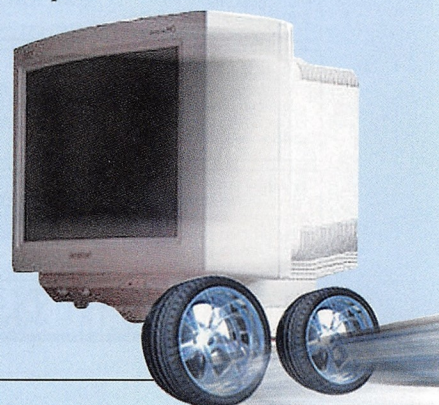
Q I have a VIA P4MA PRO motherboard. The manual tells me that it supports 2.2GHz and upwards. I have a P4 2GHz CPU installed. When I try to overclock through the BIOS settings, nothing works. I can only run my rig at the standard 2GHz. Is there a way of overclocking my system? Is it worth doing? I have 512MB of RAM and a GeForce4 Ti4200-8X.

Jack (anzacjack)

I have a VIA GA-6VXE7+ motherboard. I had a Celeron 556MHz processor but I've upgraded to a 667MHz PIII. I desperately want to up the processor speed as much as possible, but regardless of what I do, my computer refuses to let me overclock it.

Luke

A There is little or no overclocking headroom in either of these CPUs - especially the 667 PIII and especially a "D0" stepping for the P4 (zippo chance there). Many regular readers of SetUp will recall the CPU Stepping Guide I wrote last year. The critical factor I highlighted is the specific 'stepping' of the CPU and where it sits in relation to faster CPUs within the one stepping. A processor's family, model and stepping numbers refer to the manufacturing process on which a processor was manufactured. I pointed out that CPUs of various speeds can use the one stepping until the wafer runs out of headroom and can go no faster. Inevitably, a redesigned silicon wafer is fabricated to keep speeds going up. The most obvious manifestation of wafer redesign is the size of the 'process' used. Many of us would've started with a 0.25 micron process PII or PIII and some of us have upgraded through the 0.18 micron process to 0.13 microns - now, there's a 90nm process. Even if the CPU is willing, the motherboard electronics have to support overclocking through the BIOS. While this motherboard support for overclocking may be plain enough, the motherboard has to be actually physically capable and not want to cough and fart about it. Look for the .pdf download at <http://developer.intel.com/design/pentium4/specupdt/249199.htm> to compare steppings and CPU speeds.





TOO POOR FOR HELP

Q I recently bought a new computer, however, when I'm connected to the internet (dial-up) and haven't touched the mouse for a little over half an hour the computer always freezes on me. The guy I bought it off said he'd have to charge \$50 for technical work, and seeing as I'm a lowly Uni student I was hoping you guys might have the answer. I'm running WinXP, 512MB RAM, AMD 2600+ with a 256MB FX5600 vid card.

Dirk Diggler

A If any component is faulty, the retailer may not charge you for the services provided. They can, however, charge like a wounded rhino if the problem turns out to be PEBKAC (problem exists between keyboard and chair). Some USB modems, Dynalink in particular, are known to conflict with older motherboard chipsets and the system turns to treacle but I doubt this is your particular problem. Check the hibernation and power settings in the Control Panel. Turn them both off and see if the problem persists. Turn them back on one at a time to potentially isolate the problem. I would also check for BIOS updates at your motherboard vendor's website because ACPI issues (Advanced Configuration and Power Interface) still occur with late model systems.

RESTORE HOPE

Q I currently have an AMD Duron @ 800MHz, 384MB RAM, GeForce 4 Ti 4200, 20GB disk, and I want to upgrade as cheaply as possible to something that, while not being the fastest thing around, will last me for the next couple of years. I was thinking of an AMD Athlon

XP2500+, ABIT NF7 nForce 2, 512MB 333MHz DDR RAM and an 80GB ATA133 disk. I would like to use some of my existing hardware to help keep costs down such as my current video card (AGP 4x) monitor (Compaq MV 740) and OS (WinMe) until I can afford something better. Will it work on the above motherboard, especially considering that I don't have a copy of Windows but a quick restore CD instead?

Byron Boucher

A If what you listed fits in your budget then you've chosen well. Have a look at the Gigabyte nForce range of motherboards for alternatives and consider name-brand RAM like Corsair. A larger disk will be better value and you can also purchase an OEM version of WinXP at the same time. But the answer to your question is yes, it will work fine on that board.

WHAT DID I DO?

Q Every few minutes I get this message that "Files that are required for Windows to run properly have been replaced by unrecognized version. To maintain system stability, Windows must restore the original versions of these files. Insert your Windows XP CD-ROM now". I inserted the CD, did everything that was

required and reset my PC. Two seconds after I log on, the same message appears, and I came to conclusion that it was a virus. I then scanned my whole system with the latest version of Norton Systemworks (Virus Definitions are the latest) ... nothing. I scan my whole system every month to see if it detects the problem, but the results are the same ... nothing. A few weeks later, I bought PCPP #97 and something piqued my interest: a letter from Matthew Gregor in SetUp, who seemed to have the same problem as me. I can tell you now it's not Parite! I checked Parite and it hadn't done the same kind of damage as the supposedly existing virus on my system.

Charles Cote

A The error message can only mean two things: a totally rogue application or malicious software i.e. a virus. There is a good enough description of the Windows File Protection Feature at <http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;222193> as to why this should never happen. Irrespective of your AV software version and the date of the file definition you *can* catch a virus/trojan/worm or other form of malware. Parite is just one virus, but a common one, that can stuff your system in this way.



SQUISHED MICE

Q I have a large issue with my mouse in WinXP Pro. It insists on double clicking all the time. I simply click on something and it does a second click for the price of one. It only happens for the left mouse button and the only real good side I can find is in my games as a few extra bullets in your enemy does not go astray.

Temprasphere

A The one click-double click is a feature of many mouse applications and Windows. The fact that it still manifests in-game suggests that the mouse is bugged. Try it on another PC before ditching it for a newbie.

GO TO SLEEP

Several readers wrote into say that their PCs won't turn off after exiting Windows. The message that "It is now safe to turn off your computer" is wearisome and fixes range from a simple setting adjustment to a BIOS upgrade to a replacement motherboard. This behavior may occur if: 1) Your computer supports the Advanced Power Management (APM) feature, but the Advanced Configuration and Power Interface compliant BIOS is not configured correctly to allow the operating system to turn off the power supply. 2) During an upgrade of the operating system, Windows does not detect that the computer is ACPI compliant. 3) An OEM device driver or service is installed on your computer that is preventing the computer from correctly shutting down. 4) Your computer is not ACPI-compliant. Open up <http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;810903> for a list of fixes.

CRAZED FAN

Q I just recently upgraded my CPU from an Athlon XP2100+ to an Athlon XP2800+. I'm not sure if the CPU temp should get up to 62 degrees (my previous CPU hovered around 45 degrees). Is the 2800+ meant to go that hot? Is my current CPU fan and heatsink not suitable? If it is please tell what is the best fan and heatsink I could go for. I'm running my 2800+ at 2.13GHz at the moment.

Jun

A The 2800+ Barton defaults to 2083MHz so I guess you're overclocking. Late model CPUs run hot, much hotter than we're used to. Unless it gets up to around 85-90 or starts crashing don't sweat it. As for aftermarket heatsink/fans, the best one is one that makes no



noise. Intel and AMD simply cannot afford to bundle sub-standard cooling systems with their CPUs. I gave up on after market cooling systems years ago despite their great looks. Stick with stock items unless you are a 'professional' overclocker or you have industrial grade earmuffs.

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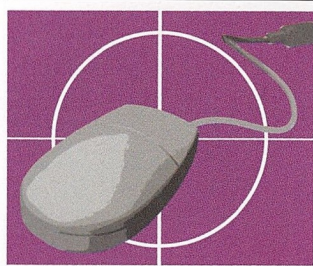
XtremeOverclockers

Viper1337- as pictured left. CPU: Pentium4 - 2.6Ghz at 3.1Ghz
17" Samsung 172n TFT. Case, K/Board, Mouse: Thermaltake Lanfire
Asus Radeon 9800XT 256mb. - Modem, Speakers, CD-RW, DVD-ROM
Ram: Corsair Twin-X DDR PC3200 512mb Low Lat. Kit. Win XP-Pro
HDD: Dual 80GB SATA Drives in Raid-0, 160GB Superfast Retrieval.
Asus P4C800DXE. Gamers Dream PC, Built by serious Gamers.

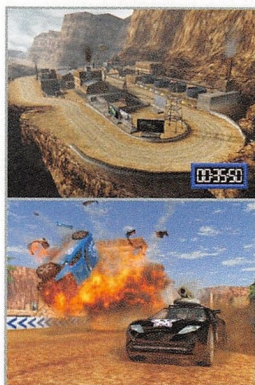
InfernoPC. CPU: Amd Athlon 2.5Ghz at 3.1Ghz.
Screen: Samsung 753dfx 17inch CRT. Case: Vtech (dual neons)
Video: Asus 9600XT 128mb. Ram: KingstonDDR 256mb PC3200
Hard Disk: 80GB 7200rpm ATA Drive. Windows XP Home.
Mainboard: Asus A7V8X. Modem, Speakers, DVD-ROM.

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The Hub



RE-RE-VOLT

The spirit of *Micro Machines* lives on in *Mashed*, a top down racing game from UK studio Supersonic. There's a definite multiplayer focus here as drivers use machine guns, flamethrowers, flares and air strikes to knock their opponents out of contention. We haven't seen a good action racing game since *Re-Volt*, so we've got our fingers crossed for this.



Moving Out

Online gaming given the run-around

There have been three recent announcements to paint a picture of the near future of wireless gaming. Firstly, a massively multiplayer game has been announced for the N-Gage. Sure no-one really has one and the game sounds a bit iffy, but it shows that even phone companies know which way the wind is blowing.

Next, Square-Enix announced it has bought an American wireless developer called UIEvolution. Square-Enix has already translated games like *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* for high-end iMode phones in Japan. With the huge MMORPG *Final Fantasy XI* – which lets PS2 users adventure with PC gamers – under their belts expect big things from these guys.

Thirdly, the US company ArrayComm has developed adaptive antennas which dramatically boost the range of wi-fi networking and it has decided to test it here in Oz with local company Personal Broadband Australia leading the charge.

The big advantage of the iBurst technology is that it allows broadband-speed access to your network at up to approximately 14.5km from the base station. It does this by sussing out where you are and then firing the signal straight at you. If you can hack your speed dropping to about a third, then, according to PBA, your range can be extended out to about 90kms.

Several companies have signed up for the test and stories like one

executive taking the bus home so he could stay connected for the whole trip are starting to trickle back in.

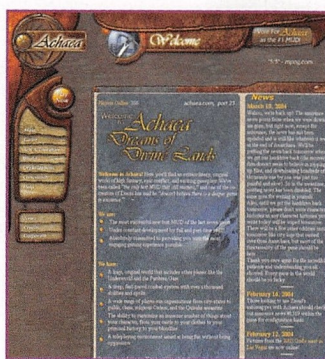
Other companies plan to test the service here and if it's a success it will be rolled out in the U.S. Before you get too excited, you pay for the luxury of being able to play *Unreal Tournament* anywhere in the downtown area ... subscriptions cost \$150 per month, the PCI cards are \$500 a pop and there's a per meg cost after the first 500.

So, this will make some definitions a little odd, since you can be hooked up to your network several city blocks away. I'm guessing that LAN parties don't quite have to be so local anymore.



Muddy Anarchy

Sounds like fun, huh?



Sometimes mayhem is just plain fun. That's what people playing *Achaea* found. When the text-based MUD suffered a major hard-disk meltdown and the data had to be sent off for retrieval, the developer decided to run the week-old back up of the game world and subtly let everyone know that they were going to wipe it at the end of the week.

As you can imagine, people decided to go nuts and have a little fun in their new playground. With the developer coming to the party with killer butterflies and socks of death, not to mention the fact that they were more than happy to toss a

few lightning bolts around to smite people by request.

While in this state of random acts of destruction the game's popularity went up a couple of notches and it hit the top of the Top MUD Sites list.

Of course the wild times couldn't last. You'd get pretty bored being struck down from on-high every day now wouldn't you? That's not to say that *Achaea* has fallen like a stone, it's still number two on the www.topmudsite.com list. If you think you could do with a little roleplaying, and you can read, then check this baby out. Go the mighty MUD!

China Gets A Touch of Canberra

It's a Big World after all

Over the years we've watched Canberra-based *MicroForte* pick up a bunch of awards for its *Big World* technology that allows up to a million players to share a seamless world. First we tasted the bitterness of the first *Big World* game, *Citizen Zero*, going Xbox only, now we find out that to play the first PC game, we'll have to speak Chinese. Yep, a Chinese company, Netease has been the first to game developer to leap into the PC fray with *Big World*.

With online gaming really taking off in China (it helps side step the piracy that's rife there) and the Korean games being expensive to license, a lot of Chinese companies are looking to develop their own MMORPGs.

A Microsoft Program Manager has described *Big World* as "the most advanced and comprehensive solution that has ever been offered for massively multiplayer game development," so it looks like Netease might

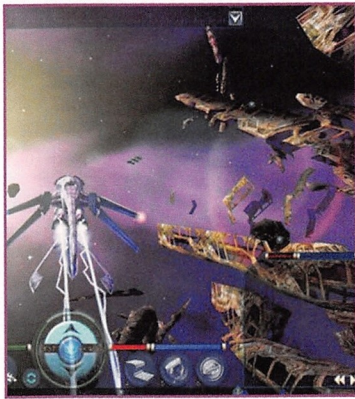
just have bought the advantage it needs to stand out of the crowd.

Hopefully the game really showcases what this baby can do because it's been really annoying seeing *Big World* fade from sight, no matter how many Australian technology awards and big thumbs up it has gotten. *Citizen Zero* crossing to the darkside, having all its info pulled and getting a possible name change hasn't helped much either.



Another One Bites the Dust

Cancellation reaches Earth & Beyond



Last month we talked about the axing of Uru: Live and Mythica, well now EA's Earth & Beyond has been grounded. Unlike the Uru and Mythica, E&B had been up and running for nearly two years.

In a statement obviously carefully crafted to give E&B players warm fuzzies EA thanked them for their efforts and said that it was closing the game so it could concentrate on future projects.

In a strange move, instead of making players go cold turkey, EA is winding the game down slowly, leaving it running until September 22. I'm sure this is going to be a double-edged sword, not only giving people

time to get used to the idea but also to give everyone with an account a chance to sign petitions and write angry emails.

Personally, I'd prefer a clean break, but that's just me.

The developers of both Eve: Online and Jump Gate have decided to take some subscribers off EA's hands by offering ex-Earth & Beyond players a free trial period and help with the transition between galaxies.

EgoSoft, the makers of X: Beyond the Frontier and its sequel, is planning to go massive with its universe so it's not like ex-E&B space jockeys are going to be left out in the cold.

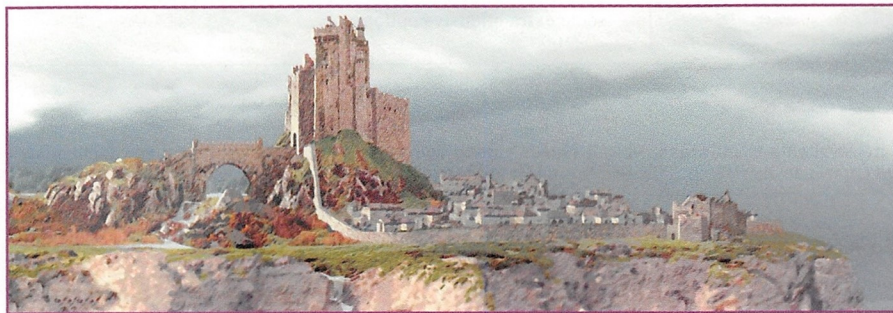


ICY WELCOME

Our Icelandic friends at CCP have taken pity on the poor souls left drifting through the cosmos since the closure of Earth & Beyond by offering former E&B players a free trial of their own space sim EVE Online. Not only will you get a no-obligation sample of an excellent game but experienced EVE players will guide you through the game and explain the differences between it and EA's aborted mission. Check out www.eve-online.com for more info.

Vanguard: Saga of Heroes

MS's next MMORPG announced



The project that knocked Mythica off Microsoft's play list has finally been revealed and it's starting to sound a lot like EverQuest.

Considering that Vanguard: Saga of Heroes is being developed by a studio lead by one of the co-creators of EQ this isn't a real shocker.

It's even been stated that the choice of a high-fantasy world with knights and dragons was an easy one because that's where the players are.

In its bid for player gold Vanguard

will offer such features as a huge, seamless world, player-crafted houses and vehicles, massive cities and a cinematic feel that is poles apart from the cartoony look and feel of World of Warcraft.

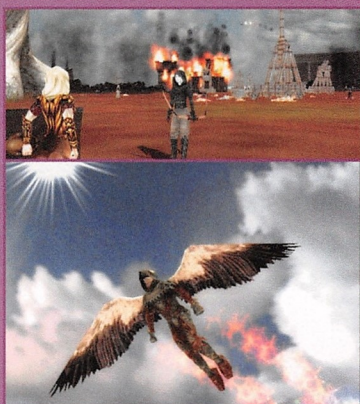
Other than those details, Sigil has been remarkably vague on how Vanguard will advance the craft beyond saying that it has reworked the encounter system to avoid the tedium of camping and that it's not buying into the rubbish that watering things down will attract casual players.

On one level you've really got to appreciate the notion of trying to out-*EverQuest* *EverQuest* by catering to hardcore players, having raid zones as well as more casual areas, reducing downtime, packing on the phat lewt, including comprehensive crafting as well as featuring cutting-edge graphics. We'll keep you up-to-date as Sigil shows us a few more of the cards it surely has stuffed up its sleeves to lure away the elves, dwarfs and trolls from their chosen games.



FORGOTTEN REALMS

The MMORPG previously known as Realms of Torment has changed its name to something less likely to make you think of Planescape: Torment then get disappointed when you realise it isn't a sequel. Uh... so yeah, it's now called Mourning, thus paving the way for all sorts of clever puns when it's finally released in a buggy state like every MMORPG. "Mourning is broken..."?



Shadowbane Reborn Asian-Style

MMOG make-over

Manga Shadowbane? Well, not quite, but the MMOG is getting a make over to help tap into the growing Asian market. Adapted by Hong Kong publisher En-Tranz, it means that once it's done there will be two flavours of Shadowbane: the French Cuisine and a Touch of Asia (I made those names up).

Just what does a game have to do to be more appealing to Asia?

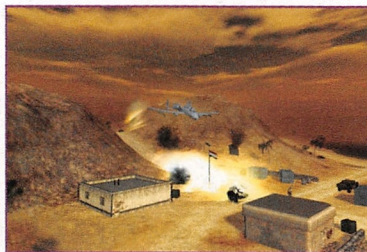
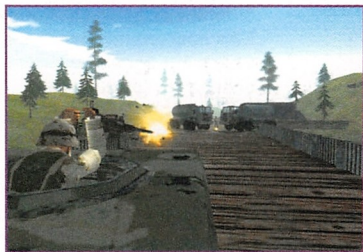
Well, the new version moves away from mouse-controlled movement and gets old-school with WASD keyboard controls and there is a different slant to experience, with the first 20 levels being much easier to obtain and the last levels much

harder. Naturally, all of the character art has been reworked, the game is getting an overall overhaul for a crisper look and the soundtrack has been re-jigged. Of course, there have also been a bunch of fixes.

I wonder what a game customized for the Australian market would look like?

Desert Combat Extended (DCX)

For: BF1942: Desert Combat ■ URL: <http://dcx.serverxtreme.com/index.php> ■ Size: 159MB ■ Score: 4/5



Mods for mods are a confusing spectacle. When you start combining the work of a lot of people into one product, it becomes really hard to define who can take credit (or abuse) for certain features. Desert Combat Extended (DCX) is a "mini mod" for Desert Combat, the popular mod for Battlefield 1942. DCX is all about extending the vehicles, especially the airborne variety and their anti-maritime capabilities. One thing Battlefield 1942 really lacks is a compelling naval combat dynamic, and DCX's additions finally make it seem worthwhile to go out on the open ocean and sink a few battleships. As regular carriers and ships have about a bazillion hit points, it makes sense to add a few weapons that can puncture their thick skins. And there's quite a selection. The Seahawk chopper, which previously was a lame kind of flying bus for pedestrians can now launch torpedoes into the water, which can then track ahead and hit ship's hulls with devastating effect.

There are five extra flavours of Hind helicopter to choose from in DCX - the maritime version, the Mi-25M carries four Exocet anti-ship missiles, as well as having the handy ability to float on water. DCX also improves stand-off weapon abilities, such as player-guided Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from destroyers and submarines, with corresponding player-guided SCUDs on land, which are far more dangerous than their predecessors. And the SCUD launchers will learn to fear the MOAB, the Mother Of All Bombs, which can be dropped from the Hercules cargo plane. Add this to deployable fixed weapons, new soldier classes and adjustments of almost every vehicle in the game. DCX brings a dizzying list of enhancements to Desert Combat, making it a selection of choice for Desert Combat fans who crave variety and some extra offensive options.



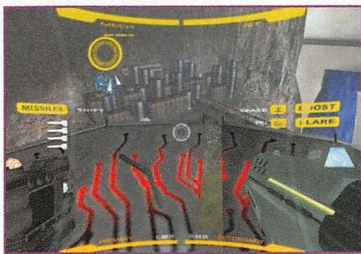
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BROADBAND



Jupiter Effect Influx

For: UT2K3 ■ URL: www.planetunreal.com/jei/ ■ Size: 51MB ■ Score: 3/5



Boost into the air. Land on top of a nearby skyscraper. Rain down laser death from above. Then spring away in an impulsive acrobatic move, transforming mid-air into a sleek jet fighter and soaring away.

Jupiter Effect Influx takes the terrestrial fantasy gunbattle of Unreal Tournament 2003 and twists it into quite a different style of game. Drawing from influences like the Playstation mecha-dual series' Virtual On and Gundam, Jupiter Effect allows you to fly like a madman as though gravity doesn't exist, using buildings as sandbags in a city-scale conflict.

The key features are the ability to transform into a jet, along with fairly impressive destructible buildings which shatter under the unrelenting garish future-fire of the combatants. There's a collection of cute additions like flares, seeking rockets and the ability to hold guns akimbo, which can be fired simultaneously with the left and right mouse buttons.

Of course you've got an arsenal of mostly laser sci-fi weapons, along with a clever sniper scope that projects the zoomed view onto the regular screen view, window-in-window. The maps are all city blocks, of course, scaled to the requisite giant dimensions of mecha fighting robots.

While the concept shows promise, JEI isn't quite up to the standards that would give it a chance at becoming an underground hit. The extreme unbalanced ballistic nature of the weapons makes the combat hellishly fast and instantaneous, while some environment textures could also use some work.

On the whole though, Jupiter Effect Influx is a very well presented mod and the concept has been well achieved.



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GARAGE GAMES

Into the unknown with George Soropos

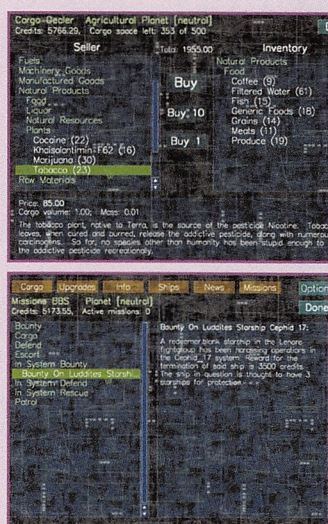
VEGA STRIKE

Developer: Daniel Horn, Horn Junior, 'Jack' & others Genre: Space URL: vegastrike.sourceforge.net/



Welcome to the one year and a bit anniversary of Garage Games, cunningly timed to coincide with our 100th issue celebrations. You would have already seen the editorial announcement that all of you are being flown to the Miss Universe pageant in Rio, all expenses paid, with a shopping stopover in Monte Carlo and a chance to actually drive a Ferrari at Monza for the Italian GP. This will in fact be the first time in history that the great race has been run 80,000 times in a row, to make sure everyone gets a decent turn. It will also be the longest time F1 supremo Bernie Ecclestone has ever spent bound and gagged in a basement. Our publisher is going all out to show you the love this month, love that can only be matched by the dedication of indie developers like Daniel Horn and company.

Vega Strike is Daniel's baby, a space trader along the lines of the classic Elite series. Vega Strike embodies all of the best aspects of a good Garage Game, which is why we chose it for this exclusive one year and a bit special. Vega's 165Mb download is easy to install and comes in PC, Mac and Linux flavours. The game lacks detail in some areas, such as the graphics in the static screens like stations and planet docks, but has a great space combat engine and enemy AI. It can also boast some good audio tracks and pretty extensive controller support. Daniel was kind enough to answer some questions for us and in



return we promised not to make his house a stopover for our epic Miss Universe odyssey:

PCPP: How long has it taken to get Vega Strike to its current state and how many people have been involved in the project?

Daniel Horn: Well I started Vega Strike in 1998 in high school. I remember because I wrote it all down in the news system and managed to keep that in tact, so you can even go back to see old news reports when I wrote with many exclamation points!! Since then I started over in 2001, rewriting Vega Strike to be cross-platform and have all new data structures and more



Download: vegastrike.sourceforge.net/files/index.html

extensible code. I had to do a few rewrites to this one, but it's been pretty consistent. The people, well I've written around 80-90% of the code, and my brother has written a good portion of it too, perhaps around 6-10%. Our minister of information, Jack, has done a superb job with the dataset, integrating tons of new starships and making sure the dataset has a consistent feel to it. The rest was done by volunteers who came and went as they pleased.

PCPP: SourceForge.net seems to be a good way for people interested in developing their own software to meet up and also find help and advice. How important has it been to Vega Strike?

DH: I think it's been very important to getting new artwork. I've had artists fervently work on Vega Strike for like 2 or 3 months (Howard Day being the most prominent and successful example; he made most of the starships you play with today). But invariably these people go away, leaving a glittering, beautiful mess that the programmers have to clean up, add stats to, and get ready for mainstream :-)

PCPP: What was the most difficult aspect of the project?

DH: The most difficult aspect was getting distances up to par with real life. We had to carefully insert double precision floating point

computations to assure that players could actually fly out to Pluto and fly back to earth with all the spatial distance between them. It was a challenging problem and not one that I've seen other games solve. The next thing we're doing is working on hyperbolic space, basically as you fly between planets you go blindingly fast, but when you get near a planet you slow down for local combat. You can go blindingly fast when you're in the middle of nowhere, but as soon as you try to land your slaves on a planet the Feds will nab you.

PCPP: What are your ambitions for the future with respect to Vega Strike?

DH: Making it more immersive, people will see planets streak by, and when they get close the detail will suddenly get immense and they'll be able to see hills and terrain. The economy will be really immersive. AI ships will be everywhere, giving the universe an 'alive' feeling.

PCPP: To give us an idea of your gaming influences can you tell us a few of your all time fave games and what if anything other than Vega you play at the moment?

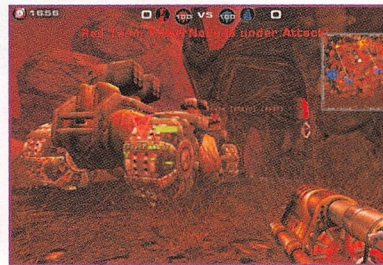
DH: Privateer, Master of Orion (the original), Wing Commander I, Spectre. My bro is working on a Spectre remake; it should be pretty sweet when he gets some free time!



Unreal Tournament 2004 Multiplayer Review

Get Ready for a Fist Full of Glowing, Neon Boomstick

Developer: Epic ■ Publisher: Atari ■ Distributor: Atari ■ Rating: MA 15+ ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Available: Now



Following our advance scoop review of UT 2004, we're taking the opportunity to look at the retail version and evaluate its multiplayer potential. The good news is, you won't be disappointed. This game addresses nearly every complaint made about its predecessor, adding vehicles, restoring the beloved Assault mode and introducing Onslaught mode, which is quite clearly the jewel in UT2004's crown.

Onslaughting

Onslaught is a terrific location-control game ala the old "Domination" mode, but applied with complex strategic elements that are easy to understand, yet difficult to master. It's a bit like a game of "join the dots", to the enemy base, and only then can you actually damage and destroy it. It's great fun trying to build and then defend a line through hostile territory, a game mode that allows almost endless variety in the skills and tactics you use to block, cut off and destroy your enemies. This is the mode we've been waiting for. It's great fun, uses a simple interface and map view and typifies UT's "pick up and play" style.

Battlefield: "Wacky Goth Techno"

As much as we love the Battlefield 1942/Vietnam/Redfern series, there are some very clunky aspects of those games, such as the need to choose your own spawn point, with no "automatic" option.

UT 2004 solves these problems in Onslaught, auto-selecting the "hottest" spawn point, not requiring any prompting, as well as placing you into the game facing a sensible direction. But there's more! The icing on the cake - the bots in UT 2004 are very capable of playing all parts of these complex team games. It's an amazing achievement, which we should have expected from Stephen Polge, Epic's guy who invented the amazing "Reaper" bot for ye olde Quake.

LET'S DRIVE

UT2004 has a fun driveable collection, with the Scorpion, a 4WD topped with crew-point cannons and the Manta, a hovering skimmer ala Halo, alongside a stock tank and the Raptor - a flying, hovering weapons platform, reminiscent of Jabba's Tatooine vehicles from Return of the Jedi. The Leviathan tank has thousands of hit points, although in the world of UT, hit points don't amount to much, as every player carries an arsenal of guns and ammunition. This shows the age of the core game - carrying around ten enormous weapons reeks of the heyday of heavily imbalanced first-person-shooters, of which UT is the last remaining representative.

AVRiL Assault

Along with a rocket launcher called AVRiL (presumably hotter than young Ms Lavigne), UT 2004 brings back Assault - the mode with teams playing a role of attack or defence, on maps twisted to give defensive teams an advantage. You've got great multi-layered objectives this time around, which makes this classic experience even more engaging. Add the new dynamic of the vehicles, and it's really something special. And yes, once again, the bots can play it. Really well.

Talk To Me Baby

It's no secret that UT 2004 has a strong VoIP component, which works at least as well as Counter Strike or other Half-Life engine titles, but even funnier is the text-to-speech translator which processes typed comms. We've mentioned it before, but it really is hilarious to try out this feature and use the dorky robotic enunciator to conjure up "L33t" or "Hax0r" insults.

We're expecting UT2004 to have a long and cheerful lifespan, thanks to the great server admin tools and the Mutators, which allow you to tweak manifold aspects of the game settings and dynamics.

Overall, we're very impressed with this game. It should silence its detractors and give the competition some serious cause for concern.

Ed Dawson

SYSTEM

NEED

PIII 1.0GHz CPU or equivalent
128Mb RAM
16Mb 3D Video Card
3.5 Gb HDD

WANT

PIII 1.5GHz CPU or equivalent
256MB RAM
64Mb 3D Video Card
3.5Gb HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Mostly, Primarily,
Oh Yes.

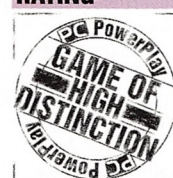
ONLINE

Official: www.unrealtournament.com

Developer: www.epicgames.com

Modders, enthusiasts:
www.unreal.epicgames.com

RATING



OVERALL

A really great example of an old franchise getting some serious rejuvenation. It's just another set of clamped on features, but they've done it so nicely, we're still impressed.

90

Online Timeline

George Soropos guides you through a brief history of our virtual universe

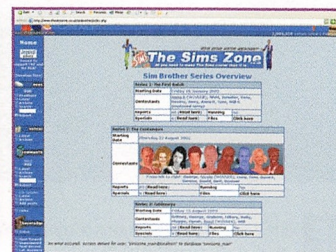
The real world has become an ever more frightening place since our first issue appeared in April 1996. Reality TV took over our screens and showed us how nasty ordinary people can be when egged on by a giant media corporation. Our government reacted to various international crises by appointing Winnie the Pooh as our foreign minister, a move applauded by the Americans who had already made Megatron their President. New cars started looking like old cars. How did we all survive this mess? Some of the more intelligent members of our species discovered online gaming and virtual worlds mostly free from the trouble and strife of reality, mostly.

A Bit of Pre-History

Most sociologists agree that the study of pretty much anything that happened before the publication of the first issue of PC PowerPlay is pointless and a complete waste of time. However there are some important pre-historical events relating to this article which we should take a look at.

Probably the most important dates are 1969 and 1984. In 1969 the world was introduced to Woodstock, Monty Python's Flying Circus, the first issue of Penthouse and a bloke on the Moon. It was also the year programmer Rick Blomme wrote the game Spacewar for a university network system (PLATO) which instantly became the world's first networked (2 player) game. 1984 saw the beginning of commercial online gaming with the introduction of the Islands of Kesmai, a text-based massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) that launched on the Compuserve public service for, wait for it, \$12 an hour! And you think your current online fees are excessive!

1984 was also notable for being the year that the French government launched Minitel, a visionary proprietary home information network which introduced the world to the concept of electronic commerce and online chat. The phenomenon of being able to buy croissants without being ignored or insulted by their local grocer was so alien to many French people that they then created the concept of the 'flame



war' to make up for it. 1986 saw the appearance of Air Warrior, the first 3D MOG, on the GENie network. The graphics were incredibly basic but it allowed Mac, Atari ST, Amiga and IBM PC owners to face off against each other in cross platform aerial combat. 1988 gave us IRC.

After a long uninteresting lull Meridian 59 reared its head in late 1995, the first real 3D MMORPG and also the first to promise a monthly flat fee that allowed players to spend as much time as they liked in the game without racking up crippling bills. The graphical nature of Meridian 59 allowed players to group together to form adventuring parties for the first time in MMORPG history. In fact it soon became a requirement for anyone traveling out of town to have a few friends around them as

more and more players discovered the pleasures of the Dark Side. The number one Player Killer in the first era of Meridian 59 was a chap named AZRAEL. His reasons for turning evil were quite banal:

"First I tried to be a 'good' player with role-playing and kinda stuff like that, but after a while it got absolutely boring. I was the first killer who killed with touch spells. I PK'ed in a team with my friends Cullynn and THE VARAX. PK'ing is FUN. I loved to hear them swear at me. That showed me that they can't have brains ;-) (but perhaps better grammar) And when you don't want to suicide your character you have no other choice than stay a PK'er because most of the people still try to hunt and kill you."

AZRAEL's advice for budding PK'ers:

"Kill as many as you can.

Nobody will ever forget your name MUAHAHAHA"

(Note: this could be the first use of the evil laugh form MUAHAHAHA by a PK'er however it is difficult to prove and any claims to that effect may result in the rapid and frequent death of any of my numerous online avatars).

The Dawn of PC PowerPlay

1996 heralded the birth of PC PowerPlay, and what brilliant timing it was with the genre/life changing event that was Quake being released in the same year. Soon there are more Quake servers across the globe than UN peace keepers. More importantly this was also the year that Origin Systems gave the industry a peek at Ultima Online, not many seemed interested. However even the testing phase of Ultima introduced a new concept to





online gamers, the public beta test. The very last day of this public test became a memorable one when the King and all around head honcho Lord British (aka Richard Garriott, creator of the Ultima series) did a magnificent impersonation of JFK and keeled over dead while giving his carefully prepared thank you speech to the assembled testers. 'Rainz' the now infamous assassin explains what happened:

"I strolled through Britain with Helios, my fellow guild member. We headed to Blackthorne's castle where the first speech was being given. Lord British, Blackthorne, and their jesters were up on a bridge orating to the masses. Luckily my character was a good thief who had high "stealing" skill. I desperately searched the backpacks of those around me and eventually came upon a fire field scroll. After that it was pretty simple, I just cast the scroll on the bridge and waited to see what would happen. Either LB or Blackthorne made the comment "hehe nice try", can't recall exactly who. It was a humorous sight and I expected to be struck down by lightning or have some other evil fate befall me. Instead I heard a loud death grunt as British slumped to his death. After that it was just pure mayhem, Blackthorne or another force summoned 4 daemons into the castle and people were dying left and right so I hauled balls out of the region like there was no tomorrow."

By 1997 when UO was in full public swing there were over 100,000 players coping with lag, bugs and a new generation of players called 'miKeDaMurDeRer'. NCSOFT launched Lineage, which would go on to become the most

popular MMORPG ever.

In 1999 Everquest and Asheron's Call open and are very successful. In 2000 Verant software seduces Rich Vogel, Raph Koster, Chris Mayer and Anthony Castro away from Origin and places them in charge of a new Star Wars MMORPG called Galaxies. Anarchy Online is a huge hit at the 2000 E3 as MMORPGs try and break free of the seemingly clapped out fantasy mould.

Dark Age of Camelot launches in 2001 and quickly takes over from Asheron's Call as the third runner in the US behind UO and Everquest. It is at this point that the developers of Everquest start receiving strange mail from Eastern Europe. "Dear Ambassador to Everquest, I am wanting to move my family from the hard potato growing region of Coldnadz to be a part of the growing community of Everquest. I have heard that you are a wealthy nation and can afford to buy my daughters in exchange for a tractor. Please find enclosed a copy of my passport, you will note that I have no drug convictions and that I have once been to Poland for the Miss Potato 1967 pageant in 1976."

Why were they getting such mail? Thanks to the sale of in-game items on auction sites by 2001, Everquest's fictional game world of

Norrath had become the 77th largest economy on earth. At this point EQ platinum is trading online at a higher value than the Italian lira! Online gaming has become serious business. However in terms of membership alone Korea's Lineage is still on top with over ten million subscribers worldwide.

It was also around this time that gamers started forming companies to sell in-game items to other players in worlds such as Dark Age of Camelot. A company called Blacksnow Interactive threatened to sue Mythic Entertainment in 2002 for 'interfering' in the company's right to do business when Mythic banned the sale of such items through online auction sites.

Today and Tomorrow

The Sims Online goes live and brings MMO gaming to a new audience, while the focus on gaming's more social aspects creates a new dynamic. No partying up; no power leveling or player killing. So of course the game's bored and black hearted players had to find a new way to make their mark and The Sims Shadow Government is born. Other mobster 'families' like the Playtime Gang spring up and go about seeking 'protection money' from other

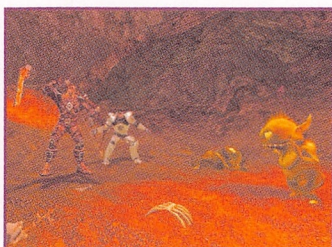
players, threatening to trash their houses if they don't pay up.

On the other end of the scale is Sim Brother, a Sims version of the popular TV show Big Brother. Players compete to have their Sim enter the Sim Brother house, complete certain tasks each day and have the gaming public vote out Sims until only the winner is left. The winning Sim then gets to have a blindingly short career as a minor celebrity releasing one CD for the 'sale bin' market and making public appearances hosting the chook raffles at Rooty Hill RSL club.

2003 was a landmark year for Star Wars gamers as it brought us Galaxies, unfortunately it seemed that 2003 was about one year too early as the game fell short of expectations and the developer had to close the forums to the public to silence the complaints. The forums have by this time become an integral part of any online game and this act of desperation by Galaxies' handlers deepened suspicions in the gaming community that the Sith had taken control of the game. Many keep watching the skies for a Death Star with their name on it.

2003 also saw the public release of Horizons, a new MMORPG with much promise, and Planetside, a massively multiplayer shooter. It was also the year that Norwegian MP Trond Helleland was caught out on TV playing a PDA game called Metalion in parliament during a debate on the Iraq war.

Our 100th issue sees a pile of new PC MMOG games still beta testing and the advent of console online gaming building a bigger and bigger online community. The 'game most wanted' at the moment is probably World of Warcraft, a 3D MMORPG based on Blizzard's RTS series, which may or may not be released to the general public this year. Unlike many of the single player genres the best of online gaming is not in the past but the future and as technology allows designers to do more and more things can only get better!





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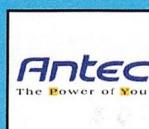
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THE PCPP INTERVIEW

Something special this month to celebrate not just our 100th issue, but PC gaming in general. We asked the same question - "Why do you love PC gaming?" - of a host of developers around the world, plus a few ring-ins. This is what they said...

The innovation. No other platform has a lower barrier to entry than the PC, which allows start ups to make innovative games. You just won't find games like Combat Mission, Space Empire IV and Europa 1400 on a console. With so many great programming languages out there — from Blitz Basic to fully fledged C++ — there is no reason for you to not make games either. So stop staring at the monitor and get coding. There are games to be made!
Rod Humble, Sony Online

Cause it is a great stress reliever - and it is a damn sight less strenuous than the gym!
Vaughan Kidd,
Auran Games

I love PC gaming because the deepest and most sophisticated games that I love the most (hardcore combat simulations, and complex strategy games) are only available on PC. For fast-paced action games such as FPS or racing games, the PC is the superior platform. PC games have far superior input devices, and typically have more player options. PC games are more likely to have "save anywhere" options - something that is sometimes literally impossible for certain games on consoles. PC games can be patched and modded. There is an incredible wealth and variety of free content for PC gaming. Developers of PC games have fewer constraints on content and can be more innovative. Developers of PC games don't have to have a hardware manufacturer's consent to publish, nor do they have to pay a royalty to the hardware manufacturer. Small independent developers can be successful with well-made niche products sold directly to targeted demographics through mail order or online. These factors foster greater creativity and innovation.
David Wessman, Volition Inc

The first two things that come to mind are diversity and scalability. PCs allow huge teams to create monolithic works of true artistry like Warcraft 3, Age of Empires, or Half Life. Smaller teams with much lower budgets can also design and develop simpler but equally addictive games like Bookworm or Rocket Mania. Finally, the open-ended nature of PCs coupled with a potentially low entry fee and a huge variety of open source tools still makes it simple for one person to take a crack at being the next Sid Meier. The sky is literally the limit for anyone with an interest in playing or creating games of all types. Another reason I really love PC gaming is something that is very easy to take for granted - the mouse. A mouse is easily the most versatile input device of all time and it is especially useful for gaming. Whether lassoing groups of men in an RTS, building a ride in your ultimate theme park, or going for a head shot in an FPS, the mouse is always up to the task. Couple the mouse with a standard computer keyboard and you have the ultimate one-two punch that makes game controls a snap in a huge variety of games.
Barry Caudill, Firaxis Games

There's only one reason to love the PC: The processing power of the hardware. There are games made every year on the PC which would be difficult, if not impossible, to pull off on other platforms. Even though that same hardware is also the bane of a developer's existence (due to the compatibility issues that arise from combinations of gear), the destination is worth the journey each time as we see the new crop of mind-blowing, eye-popping AAA-titles that come out each year.
Dave Georgeson, Sony Online

PC gaming is always where the latest gadgets are, the latest stuff, the real innovations in the hardware. Everything new in gaming starts out on the PCs; it is the bleeding edge of the industry. It's been a funny cycle for the past 25 years - the consoles eventually catch up to the PCs, and we all loudly declare that PC gaming is finally dead. Then a little while later we all wish that our consoles looked as good as our PCs.
Dave Perry, Shiny

I love PC gaming because of the flexibility of the hardware and because of the modular nature of the games made for it. Nothing is more fun than playing a deep strategy or sim title and then cracking the data files open and making it play MY way. The PC is still the best gaming platform in the world thanks to a combination of that flexibility and the online user communities that create even more new content post release.
Iaian Howe, Guerilla

So, you want to know why I love PC gaming, eh? I don't know, are you sure you're not with them? Don't look at me like that; you know exactly what I'm talking about. Look at me. Huddled in a dark corner, eyes on every exit. Well, sit down. Pour yourself a coffee. What were we talking about? Oh yes, you wanted to me to divulge my passion for PC gaming. Very well. I'm a gamer. As soon as I discovered how much fun a box full of electronics could provide I knew I had to have one for myself. Forget everything else; all I wanted for my Christmas 1982 was a Dragon 32. Convincing my parents it would be educational was the easy part. Convincing them that playing games would be educational turned out to be the tough part. From that point on my love affair with computer gaming has never ceased. I got my first 286 in 1986, and embarked upon the wonder that is PC gaming, and was ensnared by the PC's uncompromising grasp of creativity, performance, and innovation. I have played and enjoyed pretty much every genre of gaming, but tend to centre on wargames, adventures, RPGs and strategy. In these worlds are my releases, my joys, and sometimes my frustrations.

Dan Gower, Codemasters

I love PC gaming because it's so much more adaptable than a gaming console. You can upgrade your PC so your games run smoother and faster at higher resolutions, even with full screen anti-aliasing enabled! And you just can't beat the amazing picture quality, resolution, color and refresh rate of a CRT monitor or high end LCD screen. The keyboard and mouse are far superior for playing different types of games like RPGs, MMORPGs and especially first person shooters. Even if you are playing a game designed for a console system and hand held controller, you can just buy a controller and/or adapter, plug it in and go! Not to mention the variety of fantastic programmable gaming controllers out there in the market today make gaming just that much more configurable and fun to play on the PC.

Eric Masyk, Crystal Dynamics.

Modding Support! Have a crazy game idea everyone's gonna love? Stop dreaming about it and start making it. Lets face it, every gamer has a great game idea, and modding support in modern games has really brought game development into the realm of the everyday gamer. Not only can you enjoy a game for what it is, but if you think you can make the game better you can get in there and change it.

Walter Haas, Auran Games

PC Gaming is an ever-expanding world of complete and total immersion. In-depth titles and stunningly addictive gameplay enhanced through the PC's unbeatable social experience of online gaming. Pure escapism. Can't help but love it.

Alan Wild, Ascaron Entertainment

Because it's the only system where you can play with a proper joystick

Neil Donnell, Eidos

I love PC gaming for the depth of gameplay the platform can provide. There are countless PC titles that draw me into their worlds like no other, especially Massively Multiplayer Online RPGs. There's also a certain sense of intimacy you get sitting a few feet from a large monitor that you don't get on a couch in front of an HDTV. Consoles have their own strengths to play to, but the PC, with its rapid technological advances and adaptability, draws me into compelling, high resolution game worlds better and more convincingly than any other platform.

Dave Konieczny, Helix Studios

I love PC games, because I can play at work. I need a powerful machine for doing my job and it's nice that I can use the same hardware for having fun during my leisure hours. Plus, the online gaming aspect - the consoles are not yet fully there, and I need hardcore live opponents for playing serious strategy games - I guess, the PC user is the right pool of strategic talents.

Victor Kislyi, Wargaming.net

I love PC gaming because the games usually involve more customisation and persistence than console games, all afforded due to the hard drive.

Harvey Smith, Ion Storm

Unlike console gaming there's no waiting three of our years to see a very noticeable evolution in gaming; PC Gaming is a continual and consistently changing industry. Also, PC gaming has opened many doors to hobbyists, creating opportunities for them to get into the gaming industry. With a halfway decent PC you can teach yourself to model, animate, or program. The ability to do this is always going to make PC Gaming really exciting for everyone.

Chance Glasco, Infinity Ward

THE PCPP INTERVIEW

Cogito ergo ludo – I think, therefore I play. It has been said that the primary goal of life is to procreate. I think the primary goal of intelligent life is the pursuit of happiness. Would we procreate so much if it didn't make us happy? PC gaming allows me to be on the cutting edge of pursuing happiness. It allows me to have attributes and abilities beyond my own to pursue even more esoteric levels of happiness and escapism. I can ride a snowboard down a mountain with a level of skill and expertise unmatched in the real world. I can command powerful, elite, armies on a global scale or be an individual member of such a force. I can be a major league baseball player in the World Series while it snows outside. I can travel to imaginary lands where sword and sorceries exist, save the damsel in distress and defeat the evil wizard... or maybe be the evil wizard and see how long I can prevent the goofy knight in shining armor from getting my damsel! I can be a God controlling the lives of mere mortals or I can be a yellow puck trying to see how many dots I can eat before the ghosts catch me.

Joseph B. Hewitt IV, Auran Games

PC Gaming allows for a little bit of escapism, where for a couple of hours I can enter into a different world, and be someone and do things that I could never do in the real world. I can become an elite soldier, a rough and tumble barbarian, the mayor of a city, or a zany cartoon character and exercise my problem solving abilities and reflexes while blowing off steam.

Gary Stelmack, Red Storm Entertainment

I love PC gaming as mouse and keyboard are still my favourite and most intuitive controls. Multiplayer gaming is particularly fun when you can play with 15-20 mates and hear the loud screams of opponents from another room (or across the office!). It's just not the same with a bunch of mates around a console.

Grant Robertson, Auran Games

Escapism from the torments of the real world and being put into a brain imagination frenzy.
Lionel (aka. DemonSeed),
Auran Games

I like PC Games because they're always pushing the boundaries of the game play and technology. PCs are not constrained by the cyclical pattern of console technology jumps and so the games are always first to try out new techniques. Not here the veneer of Hollywood-esque 'managed entertainment experience' of some console games, PC is the home to many of the best in depth real games.

Colin Bell, JUICE GAMES

PC gaming doesn't make any sense when compared to console gaming. Who wouldn't rather be sitting in a comfy chair in front of their TV rather than perching in front of a computer monitor? Well, here's what I like about the old PC. The mouse, which makes first-person shooters really work. The internet, which makes online opponents for BF1942 or Magic Online completely accessible. And, niche market games like the hardcore strategy games I really love. On the flipside, you've got inane and offensive "chat" in online games, buggy software, patches and all kinds of other junk. But PC gaming still rocks!

Jonathan Chey, Irrational Games

As a PC game player, I love the depth of play and variety of games that are possible on the PC more than any other platform. I also like how playing a really good PC game nearly borders ritual. By that I mean, it is something I set out to do. I pick a game, set aside some time, and make a plan to sit in front of my computer to allow myself to be consumed by the game for that amount of time. When it is at its best, there is total focus in PC gaming. The keyboard and mouse go away and it is just you and the game. Thus, I typically do not just pick-up and throw down PC games in the way that I do games on other platforms. This means I play less PC games, but when I do commit to one, it means so much more. And of course, online multiplayer games simply rock. As a developer, I love the freedom that the PC allows. There really is a feeling like almost anything is possible. Even in these days of gigantic games with gigantic budgets and console ports, it is still possible for a few friends with a good idea to make a new kind of PC game or a cool mod for an existing PC game and get it out there for others to play. This is where innovation in PC gaming has come from in the past and where I think it will come from in the future. Also, mouse and keyboard is still the best control scheme in gaming.

Bill Trost, Sony Online

PC Gaming is without a doubt the most innovative and ever-changing destination for interactive entertainment. Technology reigns supreme and makes the PC a living organism, rather than a static platform. News on game development pours in from all over the world to feed the hunger of gamers everywhere. This includes news, gossip, demos, patches and cool new game trailers. PC Gaming has always delivered the most exciting experiences and always will!

Chris Taylor, Gas Powered Games

PC games are great because they are not constrained by the limits of the latest console hardware - only by the limits of the latest PC hardware which is updated more frequently. Also, the ability to download demos and updates without having to pay a subscription fee is nice.

Travis Getz, Red Storm Entertainment

I believe a good game is an alternative reality. It is more than movies, more than books. It is opportunity to unleash your imagination, this is something like an interactive dream. I'm happy to work at Buka Entertainment where I gained a possibility to play games and make games. And this is a good business indeed!

Ivan Bunakov, Buka

With PC games, there is so much variety in games and gameplay types. I can play others online without the additional membership cost associated with some consoles. All you need is the higher speed internet connection. It's convenient to download demo versions of upcoming games, which makes it easy to try out different styles of games that I wouldn't originally consider buying. Furthermore, if you like to create new levels or like to see what the modding community is up to, PC gaming is the tool for that.

Kim McLean, Red Storm Entertainment

PC gaming has always been the coolest way to play. Ever since I gave up "E.T." on the Atari so I could play up Sid Meier's "Gunship" on the C64, with this awesome keyboard overlay (!), I've been addicted to the depth and complexity of PC games. Other forms of gaming may have their place, but for sheer involvement nothing beats PCs!

Tim Train, Big Huge Games

PC gaming has always been on the cutting edge, taking advantage of tools being developed much sooner than consoles. Want to see what your console will be able to do in the future? Just take a look at how PC games are being developed now. Advances in 3D gaming, robust sound features, and multiplayer game types are all part of today's PC gaming experience. Not only are PC games a test bed for new tools, they can serve as a medium for good console gaming, by exploring the boundaries of game design through ever increasing technology.

Darren Chukitus, Red Storm Entertainment

It seems a simple enough question doesn't it? But then you actually ask yourself: What do I love about PC Gaming? Is it all of those polygons? Legions of happy little polygons working in unison, guided by a single Overmind, dancing about at the behest of their unseen Puppet Master? Or is it an audio thing? Sounds of creatures and machines that you would never hear in a normal lifetime hammering you to the back of your chair in glorious 3D sound. Or is it how many dates one gets by playing PC games all the time? Probably not. One of the great appeals of PC Gaming is the freedom of it all. At any given time a person can go be a vampire skulking through the Los Angeles Streets, be in World War II fighting the Battle of Stalingrad, or find themselves on some far-off planet fighting off uncountable horrors. There is an imaginative freedom in PC Gaming that's unlike any other form of entertainment. Unlike movies or television, which by no fault of their own relegate you to only being a voyeur. PC Games exist to immerse the player in the experience as deeply as possible. How many gamers have completed a 9-hour session of Doom 2 just to jump at their own shadow a moment later? PC Games takes you places other diversions can't, let's you do things that no one else can do, and that's why people love them.

Todd Quincey Jefferson, Activision Studios

The freedom to extend PC games is what I really enjoy. The ability to make modifications, addons, skins, maps, completely new modes of gameplay, etc, and then make it available for public download is fantastic. A lot of great online communities have been built around sharing what people have created. This has been the base for all of the most successful multi-player FPS games since Doom (IPX/TCP multi-player support), through Quake (Threewave CTF and Team Fortress), to Half-Life (Counterstrike). I'm really only interested in games that have this level of freedom. GTA : Vice-City is a rare exception, but then again you have a large level of freedom within the game even after you have completed it. You can also now get a Multi-Player hack, for the PC version anyway...

Ray Dow, Crytek

THE PCPP INTERVIEW

A few weeks ago I was having troubles with a new ISP that I'd joined. Seven buddies and I had planned to meet up on the Friday night to fly a little LOMAC online together, and I was to be the host on my new uber connection. After trying to get the game to work smoothly for 3 hours we gave up, and I was just about ready to hurl my rig through the nearest industrial sized cheese grater, ready to convert to the cult of the consoles. Thankfully there is no such thing as an industrial sized cheese grater, and the next day I finally figured out where the problem lay.

The next four hours were some of the finest gaming moments I've had in my life.

I couldn't help but keep hitting the screenshot key, as the detailed high res graphics before me were breathtaking. The depth of the avionics suite made our high tech game of cat and mouse at 40,000 feet an absorbing, mentally-taxing exercise, so it was all the more satisfying when I finally managed to obtain radar lock on one of my unseen opponents, and then despatched him with a well timed AMRAAM shot. It was the kind of complicated and deep gaming experience that you just don't get on the consoles.

That's why I love PC gaming.

Bennett Ring, PCPP

It was my first love. And that first love always lingers. You can never forget it. My first time was playing Colossal Cave on my Dad's old IBM at his office on a Sunday afternoon over 20 years ago. I've been a PC gamer ever since, through myriad genres and upgrade after upgrade. Ancient Art of War. Lode Runner. Elite. Civ. Quest for Glory. F1 Grand Prix. Ultima Underworld. Alone in the Dark. Day of the Tentacle. Little Big Adventure. Descent. The Last Express. Thief. Torment. Deus Ex. Championship bloody Manager. Brief affairs and lasting relationships. How could I not love PC gaming?

David Wildgoose, PCPP

I love first person shooters on the PC, the combination of mouse and keyboard for input is something that consoles just aren't able to match. Combine that with multiplayer over the LAN and you have a recipe for alot of fun. DirectX has helped with alot of the compatibility problems that PC games used to have. As a consumer I also like being able to download demos and try before I buy.

Alistair Phillips, Micro Forté

I love PC games because they constantly push the boundaries of content and graphical related game design. When creating games strictly for PC over console the consumer expectation for game quality and intelligent design is always very high and always growing. This presents a real challenge for designers or development studios wanting to create games that really innovate and stand out yet providing a greater satisfaction when this is achieved. PC games remain the province of the intelligent and thoughtful games player. For myself, as a designer, the challenge in creating content to match that intelligence and critical eye really excites the inner creative.

Nick Dixon, Acclaim Studios Manchester

With the move from computers to consoles for most gaming, the days of the garage game developer seemed numbered. Luckily, the recent explosion of modable games and open source game engines on PC mean that anyone interested in game development has access to very powerful engines, toolsets, and support communities. This community has fostered a new generation of experienced programmers, artists, and game designers for the game development industry.

Justin Halliday, That Game

What I love about PC gaming is making good use of the one general purpose machine. I can watch a movie, play some music, read the news, make my own software, but most importantly, play games. If my budget isn't looking too hot, I can just turn the detail down a notch. If I have a spare few hundred bucks, I can stick in a new CPU or GPU and turn the detail up a notch. With about a hundred million PCs manufactured each year, everyone's got one, and with over a thousand new games a year, there's something for everyone to play or try, from card games to total war. I can play by myself, with a friend, or a stranger. There is always someone around the world, awake and online to shoot at. It's the platform and experience that can't go away and improves over time.

Greg Douglas, Auran Games

I love PC gaming because it helps me to fend off the overpowering urge to knife pensioners and sell crack every time I walk out my front door. It prevents me from congregating with young people in malls where I could easily frighten members of our ever growing population of oldies. PC gaming gets me away from talkback radio where I am filled with terror over reports of evil black hearted refugees swarming over our shores and um...doing jobs that no one else wants to do anyway. And it links me to an ever growing community of people who can't spell very well. Plus, where else would you meet people from Iceland?
George Soropos, PCPP

The PC's input devices are far superior to a console. An FPS without a keyboard or mouse just isn't the same, and neither is an RPG.
Daniel Giddings, Micro Forté

I am almost exclusively a PC/Windows gamer because I find on that platform the games that make me think, present interesting problems to solve, and encourage real strategic planning. They seem to be much deeper and richer experiences. I also believe that the PC/Windows platform is more accessible for developers, making it easier for innovators and newcomers. This allows more risk taking and innovation, and thus more varied games being available.
Bruce Shelley, Ensemble Studios

PC games seem to have more freedom in their development and delivery. You have the big players releasing content, as well as community mod releases, which are both playable and inspire next generation content. Also, it seems there is greater ability to release bonus/expansion packs which can breath life into game. Another plus on the PC is the freedom to customise on different fronts. Add in killer video cards, multiple screens, the programmable plethora of input devices and varied sound hardware available and you have a platform that is hard to beat.
James Murray, That Game

I love PC gaming because it lets me kill people. When they complain, I kill them again and again and again. Eventually, they either give up or come to the realisation that win or lose; the contest of skill is what makes it fun. PC games are all about social dynamics...

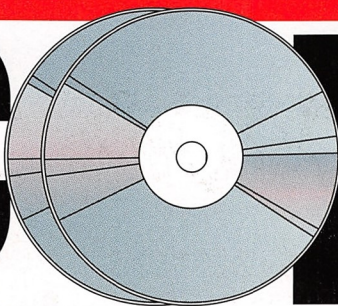
Adam Carpenter, Auran Games

There's nothing like it for online multiplayer action, it's fun to see console owners faces go funny when you show them a new game running on a state-of-the-art PC system (we'll be able to enjoy doing this for eternity), all the world's best games are on PC, and you really, really can't beat mouse-with-keyboard for super precise, instantaneous, in-the-microseconds accuracy and control. Oh yes — and running things at 150 frames per second.
Ed Dawson, PCPP

I think console gaming is cool. Fast games played on fancy controllers by up to four people, all of whom being conveniently slouched between a couch and a beverage. That's bloody great... but that's all there is to it. What I love about PC gaming is that it's so much more than playing. It's joining a clan, working on a mod, reading gamer comics, and buying a 50¢ LAN card out of a bucket. Our devotion to nerdiness has turned a childhood hobby into an adult culture, and it's something I'm proud to enjoy.
Jarrad "Farbs" Woods, Micro Forté

Many gamers continue to extol the virtues of reclining on the couch and plugging away at the latest console gem. Whilst I admit that it's a comfortable and convenient way to play great games, it will never come close to the intimacy of an engrossing PC experience. I like having my head almost submerged in the CRT monitor. I like having a plethora of hot keys and a multi-function mouse at my finger tips. For me, PC gaming is true escapism. I am fully in control, and the room around me ceases to exist. The PC may be my main port of communication with the outside world, but it's also my portal to the wonders of the Underworld, the catacombs of the Underdark and countless other retreats from humanity. I'm an RPG addict.
Eliot Fish, PCPP

THE DISC



REQUESTS

We welcome requests so please forward your requests to Disc Producer Amos Hong via email at cdgod@next.com.au or write to PCPP DVD Requests, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016



Wow, a hundred issues of PC PowerPlay. To celebrate this momentous occasion, we've tried to include as many goodies as possible onto both the DVD and CD. As always the disc contains playable demos, game movies, mods, patches and utilities. So enjoy the disc, and I hope you like the new design too!

The Spotlight once again contains the biggest file for the month - the high-octane action of V8 Supercars 2. This demo allows you to race around in a Holden Commodore, so yippee for all you Holden fans. The anime episode returns once again and this month it's the supernatural themed Yu Yu Hakusho - Ghost Files.

The Demos section includes big name games like Splinter Cell:

Pandora Tomorrow. Try out both the singleplayer and multiplayer demos. There's also some more racing action with the action packed Saturday Night Speedway.

This month Mods section is for all you Battlefield 1942 fans, as we've included version .7 of Desert Combat and the popular Battlefield 1918. The Patches page has ten patches for games like Far Cry, Star Wars: KotOR and Call of Duty, so now you can update your games to the latest version.

So, have a good month and hope to see you again in another 100 issues.

Amos Hong
Disc Master
cdgod@next.com.au

DVD CONTENTS

SPOTLIGHT/MOVIES

Yu Yu Hakusho - Ghost Files [DVD Episode]

V8 Supercars 2

TRAILERS

BF:Vietnam "Flight of the Valkyries"

Ghostriders

LotR: The Battle for Middle-Earth

Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots

ShellShock: Nam '67



Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow

STALKER: Shadow of Chernbyl Movie 1

STALKER: Shadow of Chernbyl Movie 2

World of Warcraft Sneak Peek

V8 Supercars 2 Movie

V8 Supercars 2 "Bathurst"

V8 Supercars 2 "Surfers Paradise"

DEMOS

Gangland [Multiplayer]

The I of the Dragon



Kao the Kangaroo: Round 2

Kill.Switch

Micro Flight 4

Pro Rugby Manager 2004

Sacred



Saturday Night Speedway

Syberia II

Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow [Singleplayer]

Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow [Multiplayer]

MODS

Battlefield 1918 [BF:1942]

Desert Combat v.7 [BF:1942]

PATCHES

Athena Sword 1.00 - 1.02 [English]

Call of Duty v1.3

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation v1.01

Far Cry v1.1



Gangland v1.1

Raven Shield v1.0 - 1.56 [US English]

Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow v1.1 Demo

Star Wars: KotOR v1.03

X2: The Threat v1.2

X2: The Threat Retail v1.2 - v1.3

BUNKER

Heaps more wallpaper, free games, Winamp skins, map packs and addon files for all your favourite games. Come get some!

UTILITIES

Catalyst Radeon Display Driver 4.3 7.991 - f

DivX Player (with DivX Codec) 5.1.1 - f

nVidia ForceWare International Graphics Driver 56.64 - f

Windows Media Player 9 - f

WinRAR 3.3 - s

WinZip 9.0 - s



CD CONTENTS

CD 1

DEMOS

Kill.Switch

Sacred

Pro Rugby Manager 2004

Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow [Singleplayer]

Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow [Multiplayer]



TRAILERS

STALKER: Shadow of Chernbyl

V8 Supercars 2 "Bathurst"

CD 2

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Micro Flight 4

Kao the Kangaroo: Round 2

V8 Supercars 2



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X2: The Threat v1.2

X2: The Threat Retail v1.2 - v1.3

UTILITIES

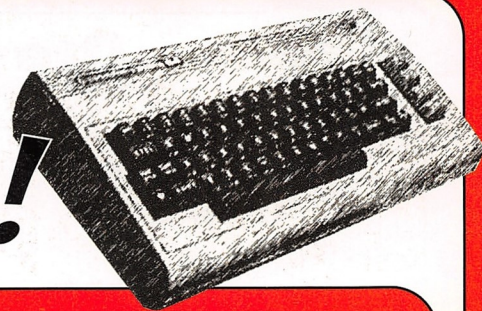
Catalyst Radeon Display Driver 4.3 7.991 - f

nVidia ForceWare International Graphics Driver 56.64 - f

FAR CRY GIVE AWAY

Thanks to Ubisoft, 100 of you are now the very lucky new owners of Far Cry, the 90% rated (see review last issue) tropical shooter from Crytek and Ubisoft. As part of our 100th issue celebrations, we slipped a random 100 copies of the full version of Far Cry into the DVD edition of this issue. If you scored one, well done! Enjoy the game!

WIN A COMMODORE 64!



Before PC PowerPlay was even a twinkle in Ben Mansill's eye. Before PC gaming was even any good at all - way before Wolfenstein 3D. Before, in fact, many of you were even born, there was a great, great gaming PC called the Commodore 64. Or, as it was affectionately known, the C64.

Like any jaded, cynical gamer approaching (or leaving behind) his 30th birthday, we look back on the days of the C64 as some kind of golden age of gaming. With dewy eyed nostalgia we

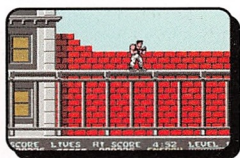
recall the beige and black box almost as a long-lost best friend. It was a purer, simpler time back then. Games were programmed by spotty coders barely out of the teens, let alone their bedrooms. The best games were based around one uncomplicated gameplay hook that would take days and weeks to master. There was innovation in almost every release; weirdness and risk-taking arrived in abundance. There weren't any World War 2 shooters. At least, not *that* many. We loved the C64. We think you should too.

I AM AUSTRALIA'S KEENEST RETRO GAMER

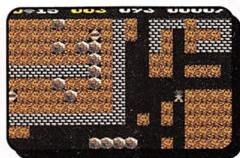
For no other reason beyond we thought it'd be a cool idea, we have a C64 to give away. It's got an external disk drive, tape deck, printer, monitor, joysticks, even a bunch of games - everything the discerning retro gamer desires! So if you missed out the first time around or, more likely, would like to be reunited with that long-lost friend, then try your hand at our Retro Quiz - who knows, you might even win! Simply name all 19 of the games pictured below and send it to the usual address, marked "C64 Comp!"



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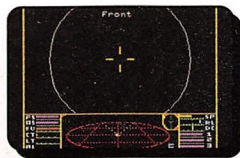
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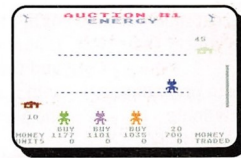
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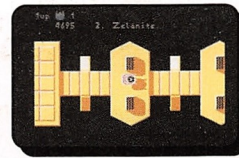
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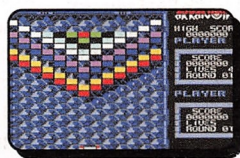
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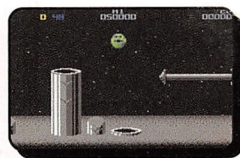
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Your name: _____

Your postal address: _____

Your street address (if different): _____

Your email address: _____

Your daytime phone number: _____

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Yellow Boots

Great Moments in a Gaming Life

A very intimate and personal recollection



The boots and I really wanted to be allowed to write the 100 Greatest Moments in PC Gaming for this issue. Then the editor explained to us that the article wouldn't really be the 100 GREATEST moments because trying to define 100 greatest moments would be next to impossible and at the very best, hopelessly coloured by the author's own personal experience. Not that the boots and I cared. We've been through fire, flood and virtual famine for this magazine, and something like the editor telling us what to do is unlikely to have much of an effect.

Sure, he has a point. Sure, there's no way the boots and I could hope to somehow come up with a list of great moments that would be right for every single person in this magazine's diverse readership. And after all, isn't PCPP all about diversity? I mean, I looked at some stats the other day and I discovered that many of our readers have girlfriends. Even some of the girls. That's right, some of our readers are LESBIANS.

What does this mean for the boots and I? Only that here is one more definitively great moment in our long history with PCPP - the discovery that some PCPP readers are lesbians.

(The boots and I would also like to point out that we're quite interested in the gay male readership of the mag too... uh, that is to say, we're keen to... no wait, we identify with... no hang on... oh forget it.)

So anyway, here's our Top 10. The ten greatest moments the boots and I have had writing for PCPP. They are in order, but not a linear order. Rather, it's a devilishly clever order devised by the boots and it's in Base Pi so you'll never be able to understand it. Unless you're some kind of mathematical savant like - according to our data - 0.0314 per cent of the readership is. Give or take 0.0001 per cent.

10. Getting the job

Obviously a fairly key moment was being asked to write for the magazine in the first place. Apparently, some monkey or other had just died and the editor of the day (who co-incidentally, is also the editor of today) was wandering dazed and confused through the streets of Redfern, weeping and rending his vestments, and I happened past and he said "Wow, cool shoes." Naturally I replied, "I also write about computer games." And then he said, "So what?" And then I said, "So maybe I can write for your magazine." And he said, "What makes you think I edit a magazine?" And I said, "The blood." And he said, "Well then, how good are you?" And then I... actually, this conversation isn't that interesting when I write it down.

9. Buying the footwear

Honestly, I can hardly overstate the significance of the day I walked into one of the new Colorado outlets and said to the lady, "I've just come from a Kulcha concert and I want shoes exactly like the ones the boys wear on stage." And she looked at

me like I was some kind of swamp-thing, and then she went in the back and got the boots and a form, and I wasn't allowed to buy the boots until I signed the form. The form basically indemnified Colorado Inc against any form of legal action I might bring against them as a result of being pummelled to within an inch of my life by schoolyard bullies because I was wearing ridiculous yellow boots.

8. Eating dog

This was definitely a key moment, oh yes. Magazine collectors and readers with especially freakish memories might recall that my first ever assignment for PCPP sent me out west to look over a dog-fighting simulator then in development. What the article of the day didn't tell you - because the editor cut it out - was that after one dog had killed the other dog, me and the developers ATE the dead dog. Raw. They said it was an important ritual, that it would make me a man. And you know, I think it worked.

7. Dungeons & Dragons: The Lawsuit

At one point I abandoned my insightful gonzo-style reportage of Australia's indie developers and focussed very closely on the release of Dungeons & Dragons: The Movie. I never saw how the movie ended because my crazy ex-third flatmate Victor Ninox tore up the Jason Recliners in the cinema and started a riot. Well, Really Big Cinemas Inc sued us, and while in court Victor tore a chunk out of the dock and hurled it at the counsel for the prosecution, which started another riot. That was a good day.

6. Being Stalked

A lot of people complain about being stalked, but I have to say that in reality it's actually kind of flattering. Oh sure, there are bumps in the night and strange heavy telephone calls, but when you wind up friends-by-default with the likes of Victor Ninox and the Guerrilla Gamer you get used to all that stuff. At least when you're being stalked, you're never lonely. My stalker's name was Emily Smitten. The hospital tells me she's now resting comfortably.

5. Searching the Net for Nude Pics of Killcreek

Do you have any idea how hard these damn things are to find? I mean, naturally I have a gold membership on Playboy.com but she's no longer in the archive. Of course, many of you readers may not even know who Killcreek is or why anyone would want to see her naked. Fact is, I'm no longer excited by natural-looking breasts. That's what Anime has done to me.

4. Getting a Major Journalism Award

Okay, so maybe this was more of a dream than an actual real event, but the night I dreamed about winning a major journalism award was still a pretty big moment for me. I was there, of course, and you were all there, except for some reason you were all fish. Then I dreamed I was a warm river. Thank God for rubber under-sheets, that's all I can say.

3. Stealing the Source Code to Half-Life 2

Let me begin by saying I look really, really good in black lycra. And when I had to squeeze under that laser beam that crossed the floor, my arse just looked totally hot. Plus I met this really sexy chick who was some kind of super spy, plus also into Half-Life 2. Then she sold me out to the CIA, so the boots stomped her to death. No wait, she stomped ME half to death. Only half - I think she was in love with me.

2. Setting Fire To Things

It's funny, but no matter how many times I do this it's always a defining moment. There's just something so pure about flame, you know? It cleanses. It heals. Okay, first it burns like a bastard and then it scars horribly, but eventually, with a lot of laser grafting, it heals. Just ask my landlord.

1. Getting a Fan Letter

This has only happened once, but what a day. It came via email, to my special Yellow Boots address that never, ever gets mail. I was so excited, I could hardly breathe. There it was, a fan letter. Sender: Xtro, it said. Subject: Da Boots, it said. I opened it. "Dear Yellow Boots, you suck and I hope you die in a freak roofing-tile related accident." I ran out into the street, shook my fist at the sky and screamed, "There you go God! I reached someone! Now give me back my testicles!"

A large military helicopter, likely an AH-64 Apache, is shown in flight over a desert landscape. The helicopter is angled towards the viewer, with its main rotor blades blurred from motion. The word "ARMY" is visible on the side of the fuselage. The background shows a vast, flat desert under a cloudy sky.

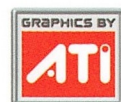
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